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Perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-teacher relations and the education of Ethiopian children

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PERSPECTIVES OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS AND ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS ON PARENT-TEACHER RELATIONS AND THE EDUCATION OF ETHIOPIAN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

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This multi-case dissertation describes a qualitative inquiry into the experiences of Ethiopian immigrant parents and elementary school teachers with respect to their perspectives on their relationship for serving the educational needs of select Ethiopian children. Data obtained from interviews and observations of three Ethiopian parents and three elementary school teachers in a large school district in the Rocky Mountain region demonstrated that (a) there was similarity across cases regarding lack of teacher preparation in working with diverse students; (b) barriers to communication between parents and teachers include language and cultural differences and parents' invisibility in schools; (c) parents are unfamiliar with the Special Education IEP (Individualized Education Program) and resist it; (d) as a result of living in different countries and speaking multiple languages, some Ethiopian parents have knowledge and forms of cultural capital that could be leveraged in schools-community partnerships; (e) Ethiopian parents can bring social views shaped by stratified class relations in their home country, to their assessments of educators in the United States; (f) parent views of teacher behaviors can influence Ethiopian student attitudes toward teachers as well as their

behavior in the classroom; and (g) the district cultural liaisons are instrumental in facilitating communication and collaboration between parents and teachers. This study contributes to a more inclusive discourse on immigrant parents and teachers' relationship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Henry (1996) noted parent-teacher dyads as "…a dance, a dance between teacher and student and parent and child and parent and teacher and so on. Knowing when to respond and when to let go and let them find out on their own is a dance, a subtle communication of letting each other know what our needs are and how we can help each other. (p. 182).

In the above vignette, Henry illustrated the intricate and subtle relationships between teachers and parents. In order to ensure academic success among culturally and linguistically diverse learners of immigrant families, knowledge of family and social contexts, and collaboration with the families is quintessential. As immigrant families continue to relocate to the United States (U.S.), an understanding of interpretative meanings of teachers and the families concerning their experiences and interactions for a child's learning is warranted. Based on the most recent U.S. Census (2010), Hersi (2012) reports that "in 2009 36.7 million residents (12%) were foreign-born, and another 33 million (11%) were native-born with at least one foreign-born parent, making one in five people either first- or second-generation U.S. residents" (p. 149). This recent wave of immigration is much more diverse than previous ones, with over half of the immigrants originating from Latin America, Asia, the Caribbean Islands, and Africa (Elmelech, McCaskie, Lennon, & Lu, 2002), while immigrants in the early to mid- twentieth century came primarily from Europe and Canada (Hersi, 2012; Schmidley, 2001). Hersi states that recent African immigrants are increasing in the United States. Between the 1990 and 2000 Census, the African immigrant

population more than doubled, growing from approximately 364,000 in 1990 to 881,000 in 2000 (Hersi, 2012; Reimers, 2005; Rong & Brown, 2002). By 2005, approximately 2.5 million US immigrants came from sub-Saharan Africa (Hersi, 2012; US Census Community Survey, 2006). According to research reports, four countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Somalia, and Ethiopia) accounted for approximately 40% of all African immigration to the United States (Arthur, 2000; Hersi, 2012). Ethiopian immigrants in the United States are estimated at 300,000-600,000 with a large concentration in the Washington DC and Maryland; in Minnesota, Minneapolis; in California, Los Angeles; and in the Rocky Mountain region. Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants and refugees in the Rocky Mountain region are estimated at 30,000 and this number is even growing (Weldeyesus, 2007) due to continuous immigration and relocation from different states to Colorado. The Ethiopian context that led to immigration is mainly poverty and injustice. Thus, Ethiopian immigrants come to the United States for a better opportunity and freedom from the political unrest.

Although this study included immigrant and refugee parents, the word "immigrants" is used hereafter as a cover term for convenience, unless it is necessary use the term "refugee". But this does not mean that refugees' studies fall under the umbrella of immigrates' studies because they have each unique experiences and some commonalities as well. Situating the study within educational research on the experiences of immigrant parents and elementary teachers in the sub/urban United States, the researcher set out to explore, describe, and explain the complex experiences of some Ethiopian immigrants. In conjunction with this major focus of the research, this study explored expectations that Ethiopian parents brought with them, the experiences of

previous relationships with a teacher and a school. Additionally, the types of interactions that characterize communication between parents and teachers and how they perceived the quality of their interactions were explored in this study. Furthermore, the social and cultural capital as well as funds of knowledge in the Ethiopian immigrant community was addressed in this study.

Statement of the Problem

Contemporary immigrant families face special challenges in the U.S. school—cultural, language and social, which also create challenges for teachers who have different backgrounds. Integration is usually demanding the adaptation of the immigrant to the new way of life, involvement and interaction in the formal-institutional and on the informal-social level of the society (Bar-Yosef, 2001). School is one formal institution and Ethiopian immigrant students across the western world are expected to face more challenging school experiences than the local students due to the differences in, or lack of, their prior school experiences as well as cultural differences (Bitew & Ferguson, 2010). Bitew and Ferguson stated that parents are one of the main influential groups within society and they are responsible for minimizing the gap and helping the education of their children. Given the language, culture, racial/ethnic, and socio-economic differences among immigrant parents and teachers in sub/urban public schools in the United States (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2009; Roxas, 2011), the researcher was intrigued by perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-teacher relations and the education of Ethiopian children in the rocky mountain region.

Elementary school is a focal point for a child's academic and social lives, which calls for partnership and collaboration between parents and teachers. The following scenario illustrates the current context of many schools with respect to teachers' experiences with a refugee student:

> Imagine that on a Wednesday morning you hear a knock on your classroom door. You are greeted by your principal with a new student at her side. Unlike other children in your classroom, however, this child is a refugee. Scarce documents suggest that the child might be around seven years of age. Based solely on this information, he is placed in second grade—YOUR second grade. Since the child has difficulty holding a crayon and books, you quickly suspect that he has never been to school. Moreover, he does not speak a word of English, and because his native language is uncommon in the United States, there is no one in the school system who is familiar with his language. Further, the school social worker tells you that the family has probably experienced untold horrors prior to finding safety in a refugee camp while awaiting a new permanent home in the United States. Having very limited information on this child's history and being unable to speak a word of his language, how would you respond to the many needs of this child—in addition to those of your other students (Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006, p. 15).

Szente, et al. (2006) reveal the intermittent educational experiences of a refugee student and the lack and/or no documentation of their past school performance history, report cards, personal information, etc. as well as language and cultural differences, all of which create difficulty for teachers to relate to the children and their families. Refugees and immigrants are all coming to the United States through different trajectories, which should be understood on a case by case approach. Children are able to adjust to new conditions far more easily than adults do (Levin-Rozalis & Shafran, 2003; Pipher, 2002). They learn a new language more quickly; by mixing with peers, they pick up behavioral norms; and by participating in educational settings, they see and learn how organizations work—opportunities that their parents do not always have. At the same time, the influence of the home is at least as important for children as the influence of school and the street. Based on the fact that parents are fundamental for their children's early

socialization, and the fact that the children are expected to be introduced to the education system in the United States, it was imperative to understand the perspectives of teachers as well as the Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-teacher relations and the education of their children.

Additionally, most teachers nationwide are not prepared to meet the complex needs of immigrant and refugee children in their classrooms, schools, and communities, and teachers as well as administrators face challenges of effectively working with refugee and immigrant population (Aleixo, 2012; Epstein, 2001; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Gándara & Rumberger, 2007; Miller, 2009; Rah, Shangmin, & Thu Suong Thi, 2009; Suarez-Orozco, 2000; Suárez-Orozco, C., Suárez-Orozco, M. M., & Todorova, 2009). According to the researchers, cultural differences present a potential for real and perceived cultural misunderstanding. The researchers revealed that differences among cultural groups are varied and range from minimal differences such as differences in accepted distance for personal space to more complex issues such as perceptions of authority figures or outlook on what is considered sharing behaviors.

Though there is a plethora of research on experiences of immigrant children and families in public schools in the United States, few of them comprehensively capture the specific group differences and experiences that affect the contemporary Black African immigrants in social and educational settings (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011; Vesely, 2011). According to Harushimana and Awokoya (2011), despite the recent increase of African-born immigrants in the United States, little is known about African immigrant histories, their cultures, and their achievements in the United States' education system, and African-born children or children of African-born parents are buried in the larger

context of the black race. In studying the immigrant population, generalizations and dichotomies can be difficult and unrealistic as they are coming from diverse sociocultural and historical backgrounds, and they have had unique life trajectories to the United States. Therefore, specific country and/or ethnic group studies could elevate our understandings of the immigrants' situations in public schools in the United States and their country/group intricacies, which would contribute to the body of literature of the background and experiences of immigrant families in public schools in the United States. To address some gaps in the body of the literature of the educational research in this area, the researcher endeavored to gain an in-depth data on the interactions and experiences of elementary teachers and the Ethiopian immigrant parents of the select Ethiopian children.

Context of the Study

The need to increase understanding of interactions and experiences of elementary teachers and the Ethiopian immigrants is the main impetus for this study. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

Q1 What are the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children?

a. What expectations do parents bring to this relationship from previous school-parent experiences?

b. What are the chief areas of concern expressed by parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed?

c. What has helped parents and teachers to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships and how they negotiate their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds?

With these open and exploratory questions, the study illuminated the interpretative meanings of the participants as well as the ways in which they constructed and conceptualized their interactions and experiences for the select Ethiopian children. To address this important, yet under examined area of educational research, the researcher focused on how the participants construct and interpret their experiences concerning a child's learning and their interpretive meanings regarding their interactions, relationships and partnership efforts. Given the teachers' and the parents' different backgrounds of language, culture, and race/ethnicity among all others, it is imperative to understand how the participants construct and handle their differences and their respective views in the best interest of students. Guided by a symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective (Blumer, 1969; 1986), the researcher attempted to capture the interpretative meanings of the participants' interactions, actions, as well as their experiences.

The researcher's experience as the district cultural liaison revealed that not many Ethiopian parents come to school events and activities including Back to School Night (Open House) and parent-teacher conferences. Even studies of families and teachers with similar cultures have demonstrated a mismatch or disagreement in thinking and lack of partnership in schools (Lahman & Park, 2004; Riddick & Hall, 2000). Since child-rearing and educating attitudes and practices have also been related to ethnic and cultural background (Holden & Cullingford, 2003), it seems that this mismatch may be even more salient when families and teachers are from diverse cultures. Additionally, school practices reflect the social norms of society, and the norms differ. In addition, teacher's/school's practices reflect different conceptions of childhood and child development. Therefore, it was essential to understand the strategies parents and teachers

use to mediate the gap inherent their cultural and language differences as well as their differences in their perceptions of their roles in a child's education.

This study is methodologically and conceptually different from the researcher's previous studies in that it included racially diverse teachers and different Ethiopian immigrant parents from different schools in the same district. Unlike the previous studies, this was a multiple case study grounded in the symbolic interactionism theoretical and conceptual framework to understand the participants' interpretative meanings of the participants' words and actions as embedded in their contexts and backgrounds. In the previous studies, the researcher only used interviews as data source whereas in the present study he used interviews and observations. The previous studies included immigrant parent participants from Ethiopia and Mexico, but this study only included Ethiopian immigrants to glean an in-depth data on their interactions and experiences with teachers and schools. The researcher only interviewed European-American teachers about their experiences with immigrant children and their families in general in his previous studies. The racially diverse teachers included in this study provided a diversity of perspectives and experiences of the participants' interactions, relationships, and experiences.

Significance of the Study

Given the different languages, cultures, and experiences as well as expectations teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents bring into a child's learning and to their parent-teacher conferences, there was an irrefutable need for understanding their perspectives concerning their interactions and experiences as partners for the select Ethiopian children's learning. Ethiopian immigrants are continuously growing in the rocky

mountain region and across the United States, and thus exploration of their interactions and experiences with teachers is warranted in the best interest of their children's education. Sweeney (2012) points out that:

> Entering schools where cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity exists might hold challenges for the teachers who work there. There is much to glean as teachers not only begin to figure out how to connect the curriculum with students' worlds, but also begin to make connections with students and families who may come from and live in very different life situations from their own (p .ii).

The challenge is even more for the contemporary immigrant families in the United States as they grapple with life and work in their new land. It is mostly a matter of survival of winning their daily bread and beginning to learn how school works as well as figuring out how to connect their children's teachers and school, who have different cultures, language, values, belief system and expectations from theirs. Sweeney (2012) states that there are varied complexities of teaching in diverse schools. Therefore, it was important to study how teachers might closely examine their own experiences and investigate how experiences of their diverse students' families intersect and dissect with those of the teachers. This study was thus significant and timely as it provided important information for parents, teachers, policy makers, and school officials attempting to design and implement family engagement initiatives, as well as implications for future direction in this area of educational research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover, understand, and gain an insight into the perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on their interactions and experiences for the select Ethiopian children. Parents and teachers both have perspectives, experiences, aspirations, and views of parent-teacher relationships as well

as child learning and development, and their interpretations of their perspectives help shape a child's learning and achievement. Parents have significant role in their children's educational development, and they are responsible to socialize them with educational settings from early on (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010; 2011). Also, parents transmit information, values, and understandings about race and ethnicity to their children—commonly referred to as racial or ethnic socialization (Hughes, Rodriguez, & Smith, 2006)—which has consequences for children's learning, well-being, and development. Parents' cultures, beliefs, values, and perceptions of ethnic or racialized experiences contribute to shaping their practices and attitudes toward school engagement.

Additionally, elementary teachers are often regarded as responsible partners with parents for children's educational, social, and emotional development, especially during their early ages of elementary education. Moreover, teacher identities, attitudes, beliefs, and ways of interacting, especially with ethnically and culturally different immigrant families, are vital components of their practice (Ayers, 1989; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Lund, 2006; Pearrow & Sanchez, 2008; Zeichner, 2005; 1991). As much as understanding the unique situations and experiences of immigrant families in public school in the United States is crucial for a child's learning, so is the experiences of teachers with immigrant families as it is essential for a better understanding of teachers' work with this segment of population (Arnot, Pinson, and Candappa, 2009). Therefore, in partnership with teachers, parents can play a significant role in the learning and achievement of their children (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999), and a child is benefitted from the joint effort of both forces—teachers and parents.

Furthermore, to really help their students, teachers must have knowledge of the students' families and the cultural practices of their communities (Sweeney, 2012). Parents have funds of knowledge that is historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Gonzalez, Amanti, & Moll, 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997), which should be recognized, valued, and utilized as pedagogical assets in the endeavor to connect home and school as partners for a child's learning. The nature of home-school relationships becomes critical in racially, culturally, and economically diverse communities where parents often report feeling shut out of school events and marginalized by the school building and district leadership (Price-Mitchell, 2009). In order to improve learning conditions for immigrant students in the United States, it is therefore necessary to examine both teachers' and parents' experiences and the nature of their relationships. This study thus aimed at shading light on lived experiences and perspectives of some elementary teachers' and contemporary Ethiopian immigrant parents.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study has successfully contributed to the growing body of literature in the field, there were some limitations that need to be considered. Though the researcher used purposeful sampling in selecting ethnically diverse teachers, this did not yield sufficient data to make teacher ethnicity a relevant variable even though this was in the original design. As an immigrant and cultural liaison, the researcher's role as participant observer and insider to the cultures under study sometimes made it difficult for him to maintain the perspective of "making strange" what he was observing and learning. The

latter limitation was overcome with the help of my readers–my committee members and research advisor–who brought to bear their outsider perspectives throughout the process, which allowed the researcher to address the representation of findings, especially regarding the Ethiopian families.

Summary

This chapter outlined a significant problem facing culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant parents and teachers today: relationships and partnerships of teachers and immigrant parents to enhance student learning. Teachers and parents have significant roles in the education of their children. This study provided detailed information about teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents' interactions.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The perspectives and experiences of teachers and parents can impact their interaction, relationship and collaboration, which may in turn influence a child's learning. Much of what happens in teaching relates to the unseen, the internal world of beliefs, thoughts, and feelings of teachers, which often remain private to the teacher (Gibbs & Powell, 2012). According to the authors, teachers generate knowledge as a result of their experiences as teachers. Equally important is understanding where parents, especially ethnically and culturally diverse immigrant parents, are coming from in terms of how they experience teachers and the school in general. Also, the nature of home-school relationships becomes critical, especially in culturally and economically diverse communities where parents often report feeling shut out of school events and marginalized by the school building and district leadership (Johnson, 2007). Most immigrant parents traditionally see education as a sole means for upward mobility, and they have even greater aspirations for their children's educational success in the United States (Kao & Tienda, 1995; O'Brien, 2010). For many Ethiopian immigrants too, education is a major way out of poverty, and desirable careers tend to be professional, such as those of a physician (medical doctor), an engineer, or a lawyer. However, most parents do not have the time, resources, knowledge, and skills to actually support their

children with their education, and navigate them through the primary, secondary and tertiary education systems in the United States.

Historical Overview of Parent-Teacher Dyads

The teacher-parent dyads in public schools in the United State have undergone significant changes over the last century. In discussing perceptions of teachers and parents regarding their roles in the early 1900's, Keyes (2002) cites Willard Waller's (1932) observation of parents and teachers as "natural enemies" (p. 109). The basis of his argument was that parents and teachers maintain qualitatively different relationships with the same child, especially in regard to affective bonds and spheres of responsibility and as a consequence they want different things for the child. In the past 50 years, however, there have been changes in how schools and families have viewed each other. Due to the developing awareness of the importance of bridging home and school, teachers and schools have made more effort to reach out to families, and families have pressed to be heard in schools. The Great Society legislation, which was designed to address the needs of "disadvantaged" populations like immigrants, marks an historical juncture in educational policy on parent-school relations (Shields, 1994). Shields stated that this legislation began with Head Start in the 1964 Economic Opportunity Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965), continued with Follow Through (1967); the Bilingual Education Act, the Migrant Education Act, and ended with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). These pieces of legislation included a requirement for some form of parent or community involvement, typically in the decision-making process through some form of council. Title I of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965, which called for community participation in the compensatory program, is one example of the legislations.

By 1970 the United States Commissioner of Education required district-level parent councils in all local agencies receiving Title I funds, and in 1974 a requirement for school-level councils was added to ensure parents a voice in the program (Shields, 1994). The trend toward stricter requirements for parent involvement in education programs shifted in the early 1980s as the federal government began to favor more state and local control of programs. As a result, policymakers showed a renewed interest in involving parents more directly in their children's education, especially in support roles at home. Policies promoting support roles for parents also go back to the early Head Start legislation and they are based on the realization that parents are children's first and primary teachers, for even school-age children spend just over a tenth of their time in formal institutions of learning. Thus, throughout the 1980s, programs such as Parents as Tutors (PAT) gained increasing prominence and were adopted in many local communities.

Policies promoting the involvement of parents focused on extending opportunities to the parents of excluded groups, and increased support at home for what was taking place in the school classroom. Both sets of policies brought parents into supporting roles in the system as it then existed. The next wave of reform had a different focus of promoting awareness of the value of the entire system of schooling. This requires a different set of roles for parents and community members instead of the traditional peripheral and random acts of parent involvement in parent-teacher conferences and

attending the Open House, and other school events (Shields, 1994). School, family, and community partnership for a child's learning is also the current trend in effort to establish the teacher-parent and school-home dyads (Epstein, 2009). For example, the Federal Title I programs promote parents' involvement in a child's education by helping them understand and take part in a school's efforts to educate the child.

Parent-Teacher Dyads and the Education of a Child

Many Ethiopian immigrants are unfamiliar with educational systems, school traditions and expectations, which compound the language barrier and cultural differences they face in the U.S. A common problem that Ethiopian immigrants face, especially at the initial stages of their arrival in the United States, is the acquisition of the English language (Weldeyesus, 2007; 2009). Although English is taught in the Ethiopian educational system from primary through tertiary level and is used as a medium of instruction from grade seven through university, using English as a medium of communication for only academic purposes does not offer sufficient exposure to the language or motivation to learn it. Some disadvantaged parents cannot engage in their children's education due to their own lack of education (Brandt, 1989; Epstein & Dauber, 1991). This indicates that immigrant students and their families do not start on even playing field with the dominant social groups in the U.S.

Nevertheless, a large body of research (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Epstein, 2009; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010) indicates that parents have an important role in their children's educational development, and that meaningful partnership with teachers and home-school collaboration helps to enhance educational outcomes for immigrant children. Parent involvement such as visits to the school,

discussion about academic content between parent and child, help with homework, time management, and parent educational expectations are positively related to child academic success and mediates the effects of poverty, parent's educational attainment, and ethnicity on achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001). Yet while the value and effectiveness of the parent-teacher and home-school partnership has been well documented, it is not always easy to promote or maintain it (Epstein, 2005; Keyes, 2002; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999). This is particularly the case with immigrant parents who experience social and/or economic disadvantages, cultural differences and language barriers. The research suggests several key areas for consideration. Central to the formation and success of parent-teacher partnerships and positive experiences in schools is providing teachers with adequate training for collaboration (Murray et al., 2008). However, few teacher education programs provide teachers with adequate preparation for effective parental partnership (Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Murray et al., 2008), and teacher education programs typically provide pre-service educators with little, if any, direct interaction with parents (Murray et al., 2008), which was confirmed from data collected from the teacher participants in this study.

Mutual trust, communication, and collaboration are essential features of effective parent-teacher and home-school partnerships (Keyes, 2002; Lueder, 2000). One way to develop trust and positive communication among parents is for the teacher to demonstrate that s/he cares about and values the knowledge and resources of the child's community. Students' cultures, languages, and literacy experiences should be treated as resources and pedagogical assets (Gonzalez, Amanti, & Moll, 2005; Moll and Gonzalez, 1997; Moll,

Amanti, Neff, Gonzales, 1992), which Moll and colleagues call "funds of knowledge"—a historically and culturally developed and accumulated knowledge of parents and communities. With trust, positive communication, and greater knowledge of the other, comes greater understanding. Often educators feel they lack the skills and confidence needed to establish and maintain effective partnerships with parents, especially with immigrant parents, due to the language barrier as well as immigrant parents' lack of knowledge of school systems in the United States. As teacher dispositions change from viewing parents as distant, uninvolved, and unknowledgeable, to valuing them as experts on the child and partners in the decision-making process, both teachers and parents can gain the knowledge and skills as well as confidence they need to educate a child (Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008), which can benefit a child's learning and achievement.

A Teacher's Role in Creating Positive School Experiences for Immigrant Families

Today's public school reality with respect to diversity poses challenges for school and home partnership, in which teachers and parents are in the front line. Research suggests that the divide can be overcome when educators develop positive, caring relationships with their diverse students, and that these relationships are critical to maintaining cohesion within schools (Darling, 2005; Stipek, 2006). For many immigrants and refugees going to their child's school and engaging in their child's learning and in school activities can be unfamiliar and/or intimidating experience because of their limited English and the necessary knowledge of school norms. According to Chavkin (2000), teachers can lead the way in the development of comprehensive family and community involvement policies in their school districts. Chavkin states that teachers can even locate existing family/community involvement policies and ask for a

review, while also reminding their school districts about the importance of a strong support system. Teachers can also remind the district leadership that discussions of district wide policy should consider budget/resource allocations, assessment of outcomes, and the collaboration process.

"Funds of Knowledge" Concept and Parent-Teacher Dyads

Next to parents, elementary teachers are those most responsible for the nurturing and care of young children, while providing academic, social, emotional, and behavioral foundations for future learning. Therefore, teachers need understanding of their diverse refugee and immigrant students' and their families' background, especially with respect to where they are coming from in terms of their values, socio-cultural foundations, and their political and historical backgrounds. To address the cultural gap between schools and immigrant communities, a concept of "funds of knowledge" was introduced in order to recognize, value, and utilize the historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Gonzalez, 1997). These researchers assert that teachers can draw upon funds of knowledge as pedagogical assets for affirming inclusive instructional practices and culturally responsive pedagogy. Villegas and Lucas (2002), for example, describe culturally responsive teachers as those who:

> a) have a sociopolitical consciousness; b) affirm views of students from diverse backgrounds; c) are both responsible for and capable of bringing about educational change; d) embrace constructivist views of teaching and learning; and e) build on students' prior knowledge and beliefs while stretching them beyond the familiar (p. xiv).

Valuing and drawing upon community funds of knowledge contributes to developing mutually responsive relationships.in which parents and teachers educate each other through open, two-way communication. Each point of view enlightens the other. School-home partnerships are more likely to succeed if such programs focus on the interconnectedness of parents and teachers through their mutual commitment to children, exploring ways to enhance and celebrate this connectedness (Keyes, 2002). Immigrants and refugees–like any other parents–have cultures, languages, traditions, and skills that they are proud of, and which schools need to tap into as useful resources.

Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) suggest six key elements of an empowerment paradigm for parent and family engagement in schools: (1) drawing on family and child strengths; (2) fostering an inclusive approach where all families are validated and engaged in a partnership; (3) recognizing and valuing of multiple venues and formats for involvement; (4) practicing a lifelong learning approach in which the teacher learns alongside children and families; (5) building trust through collaborative schemes and through recognition of multiple family involvement definitions and paradigms; and (6) linguistic and cultural appreciation, recognition, and reflective responsiveness. Through positive relationship, communication and collaboration, these and other assets of the parents can be utilized in the best interest of child's learning.

Cultural and Social Capital Concepts and Teacher-Parent Dyads

The procedural knowledge about how to ensure their children's success in the educational system (cultural capital) and the connections that they develop with key institutional agents like teachers, principals, counselors, tutors, other parents, etc. (social

capital) that Ethiopian immigrant families have at their disposal plays a pivotal role in the educational trajectories of their children.

Cultural Capital

Cultural and social capitals also focus on the social processes and interaction patterns in educational organizations; relationship of such organizations to aspects of society, social class, and power; social relations within school, college, and university; and roles of teachers, students, and administrators. Cultural capital is defined as knowledge or resources unique to a particular group that give social advantage to members of that group (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Although all families possess cultural capital, not all cultural capital is valued equally in a particular setting (Yosso, 2005). Yosso makes a case that socially and culturally marginalized groups' various forms of capital nurtured through cultural wealth that include aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital often go unrecognized and unacknowledged. However, these forms of capital draw on the knowledge racially and ethnically as well as culturally and linguistically diverse students bring with them from their homes and communities into the classroom. The culture of the most powerful classes serves as a legitimate culture that can be mastered to varying degrees (Andersen & Hansen, 2012). The authors state that students who have been inculcated in these cultural forms from childhood will have the greatest probability of academic success.

Cultural capital in the educational sense refers to the often unnoticed advantages a family has when their cultural background matches with the culture of the school (Lee & Bowen, 2006), which is typical for European American families of the dominant culture in public schools in the United States (Delpit, 1988;1995). These families are familiar

with how American schools work, know how to contact school regarding problems, be assertive in school communications, and how to reinforce and enhance what their child is learning in school. There are a number of dimensions of cultural capital that make this concept relevant for the study of immigrant parent – school relations. For Lee and Bowen (2006), cultural capital in education includes (a) attitudes gained from experience; (b) connections to educational objects (i.e. books, computers); and (c) connections to education-related institutions (i.e. schools, libraries, universities), which impact a child's educational and social trajectories. The authors define cultural capital as a function of the family's *habitus*, a system of dispositions that results from social training and past experience, and *the field*, a structured system of social relations at the micro and macro level. Differences in habitus may result in differences in parental school involvement, as it includes the inside knowledge of schooling processes and the occupational flexibility to attend school events. Cultural capital also impacts a child's educational resources as it includes access to personal libraries, large vocabularies, cultural outings (i.e. museums, vacations), and technology (Allen, 2010). Lack of cultural capital can result in incompletion of graduation requirements or lack of involvement in extra-curricular academic activities, both important for accessing higher education. This indicates that grabbing every available opportunity would make a difference in working with immigrant parents, which may increase a child's chance of learning and achieving.

Social Capital

Social capital is a related concept with important implications for immigrant education. With respect to parental support and student achievement, Coleman (1988) discusses three concepts of social capital: (1) obligation and expectations in social

relationships; (2) norms and social control; and (3) information channels, all of which are used as means to promote school achievement. Schools can enhance the social capital of immigrant families and increase parent involvement by increasing access to school information, academic skills (i.e. how to help with homework), access to resources, and sources of social control (i.e. school school-home agreement on behavior expectations) (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

To sum up, the cultural and social capital matter in teacher-parent dyads of Ethiopian immigrants. Many contemporary Ethiopian immigrant families face unique challenges in school – cultural, language and social. Those challenges become their teachers' challenges. Additionally, integration is usually demanding the adaptation of the immigrant to the new way of life, involvement, interaction, and networking in the formal-institutional and on the informal-social level of the society. Ethiopian immigrant students in the U.S. face more challenging school experiences than the dominant mainstream students because of the differences in, or lack of, their prior school experiences as well as cultural differences. Knowledge that Ethiopian immigrant families have about how to ensure their children's success in the educational system (cultural capital) and the connections that they develop with key institutional agents like teachers, principals, counselors, tutors, other parents, etc. (social capital) play a pivotal role in the educational trajectories of their children.

Elementary Teachers and Ethiopian Immigrant Parents

How parents and teachers view their roles in relation to a child's learning matters in their partnership efforts. Elementary teachers sometimes view their role as a parent, a teacher, and/or as both parent and teacher in a child's education and life in general and

Keyes (2002). Parents' cultural values or beliefs and their self-images about their roles in the education of their children can also be a factor in limiting their involvement (Crosby & Dunbar, 2012; Georgiou & Tourva, 2007; Thomas, 2009). For example, in some cultures, asking a teacher questions about his or her methods or assessment of a child would be considered disrespectful (De Gaetano, 2007), which is the case in Ethiopian context as well. In many other countries, teachers are highly respected, and parents aim to not interfere with the way teachers do their jobs (Sosa, 1997), which is also the same for Ethiopians. Thus, the mainstream cultural expectation in the United States—that parents are highly active advocates for their children within the school—are incongruent with immigrant parents' expectations of their roles in their children's education within the school.

Many Ethiopian immigrants come to the United States on the Diversity Visa Lottery (commonly known as DV Lottery). The U.S. Department of State explains the program as:

> The congressionally mandated Diversity Immigrant Visa Program makes available 50,000 DV annually, drawn from random selection among all entries to persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. (U.S. Department of State, 1997).

Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery allows an individual who obtains the visa to legally live, work and study as a resident with a freedom of movement in and out of the country. Ethiopian immigrants also come on visas of family reunion of married couples and extended families, education, and other visas granted through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The passing of the 1965 Immigration Act, the Refugee Act of 1980, as well as the Diversity Visa Program of the Immigration Act of 1990, contributed to an increased emigration from Ethiopia to the United States,

prompted by political unrest during the Ethiopian Civil War. The majority of Ethiopian immigrants arrived later in the 1990s, following the Eritrean–Ethiopian War. Immigration to the United States from Ethiopia during the 1992-2002 periods averaged around 5,000 individuals per year (Getahun, 2005). Ethiopian immigrants have since established ethnic enclaves mainly in Washington D.C., Minneapolis, California, and Colorado among all other states due to the "pull factors" of significant concentration of residents of Ethiopian and Eritrean ancestry, with many Ethiopian businesses and restaurants in the area. Ethiopian total population in the Unites States in 2009 was 186, 000, with the population distribution of 10,000 in the North-east, 14,000 in the Mid-west, 47,000 in the South, and 29, 000 in the West regions of the States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Ethiopia traces its origins back 3,000 years to the Axumite Empire, and except for five years under Italian occupation (1936-1941), it never relinquished sovereignty to a European power (Getahun, 2005; Zewde, 1991). Therefore, Ethiopians represent themselves as fierce warriors who were successful in defeating Mussolini Italy within a short period of time. Ethiopian immigrants bring this historical identity of "never surrendering" to foreign lands, and they feel pride and assurance that they will succeed despite the many hurdles they face. Also, Ethiopian is a multiethnic state, with over 70 ethnic groups with their unique languages and cultures. They have a rich history of art and architecture inspired by royalty and religion, written and oral stories, a unique cuisine, coffee, many spices, and many forms of music, dress, and dance. Ethiopia is a highly diverse nation built on the foundations of ancient kingdoms (Tijani & Getahun, 2014), which is comprised of three major ethnic groups of Oromo, Amara, and Tigre,

who are majority Christian followed by Muslim. Tijani and Getahun indicate that Ethiopia is Africa's second most populated country, next to Nigeria, and a melting pot of traditions. Given their rich and diverse languages, cultures, social, and historical backgrounds, an examination of how Ethiopian immigrants construct and interpret their experiences with their children's teachers and of a school in the United States may reveal salient differences in this group usual viewed as being homogeneous. The diverse histories, traditions, languages, experiences, and expectations of Ethiopian immigrants in the United States will shape the roles, values, and norms they bring to their relationships with schools.

Summary

The literature review explored research in the areas of: historical overview of teacher-parent dyads in the education of a child, teacher-Ethiopian immigrant parent dyads, role of the teacher in creating positive school experience for immigrant families, "Funds of Knowledge" concept and parent-teacher dyads, cultural and social capital concept and teacher-parent dyads, as well as its impact on the instruction of English language learners. Literature regarding the role of the teacher in improving instruction for immigrant students stressed the importance of teachers using immigrant families' "Funds of Knowledge" as pedagogical assets. A major issue facing sub/urban schools is the disparity between diverse student populations and the dominant school culture, which is evident in the kinds of expectations, values, and practices that are prevalent in schools and are exacerbated by the rise in numbers of children living in poverty, class and race-based assumptions of academic competence, and ultimately the contrast between the demographics of urban student populations and their teachers and administrators.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Data collected and analyzed in this study were based on the participant parents' and teachers' perspectives, experiences, aspirations, and views of parent-teacher relationships and partnerships, which impact a child's learning and achievement. The purpose of this study was to discover, understand, and gain an insight into the perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on their interactions and experiences for the select Ethiopian children. An intrinsic in-depth multi-case study design was chosen as appropriate research methodology in order to discover, understand, and gain insight into the perspectives of each case and across the cases on the participants' interactions, actions, and experiences of their relationships and partnerships (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). An intrinsic multi-case case study is undertaken because one wants better understanding of this particular case (Stake, 1995). Stake highlights that intrinsic case study is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of primary interest. In the present study too each participant is a case and the primary purpose is to discover, understand, and gain insight

into each case, and generalizing from each case to their respective racial groups is not the primary concern.

A qualitative multi-case study was used to explore and understand the meanings of each case and then across the cases. Because comparisons would be drawn, it was imperative that the cases were chosen carefully so that the researcher could predict similar results across cases, or predict contrasting results based on a theory (Yin, 2003). Therefore, purposeful sampling strategy, which was "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61) into the case, was used to locate the participants.

In a multi-case study approach, the researcher selected multiple sites and participants of different geographical locations (Schwandt, 2007). Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that "the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight into the case and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Moreover, Stake (1995, p. 56) makes a case that the researcher should have "a connoisseur's appetite for the best person, places and occasions" as sources of data. Accordingly, the participants were carefully selected to ensure that they were potential informants. The study provided opportunity to shed light on and learn from the multiple perspectives of the different racial cases, and there was no assumption that participants were representatives of their racial groups. Since each participant was a case and the purpose was to discover, understand, and gain insight into each case, generalizing from each case to their respective racial groups was not the primary concern and this could also be problematic. The teachers and parents in each school were paired based on their common target, a child. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

Q1 What are the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children?

a. What expectations do parents bring to this relationship from previous school-parent experiences?

b. What are the chief areas of concern expressed by parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed?

c. What has helped parents and teachers to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships and how they negotiate their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds?

In-depth, semi-structured interviews, observations, field notes, researcher's journal, and archival records were used to collect the data. Observation was useful to understand better the participants' verbal and nonverbal cues and interactions in their efforts to partner in a child's learning. Furthermore, the researcher became reflexive of self as a researcher. Reflexivity, which is the process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher, the "human as instrument" is important in qualitative data collection and analysis process to enhance the quality of its findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The authors emphasize examining what the self as the researcher brings to the field, what the self as the researcher situationally creates in the research process and how those selves come into play in the research setting and consequently the distinctive voice the researcher brings to the research, which I included in this study.

Conceptual Framework

The central assumption of constructivism is that reality is socially constructed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The authors state that:

> Individuals develop subjective meanings of their own personal experience, and that this gives way to multiple meanings. Therefore, it is the researcher's role to understand the multiple realities from the perspectives of participants…by becoming involved in the reality of the participants and interacting with them in meaningful ways. They also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work to understand particular cultural and historical settings. (p. 9).

The present study was grounded in symbolic interactionism conceptual framework (Blumer, 1969; 1986; Mead, 1934) that asserts reality is subjective and socially constructed and one in which the researcher explores the interpretative meanings of the participants' interactions, actions, and experiences with each other (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Symbolic interactionism is a sub-field of constructivism (Schwandt, 2007), which "emphasizes the actor's definition of the situation" (p. 39), and a stance that views human existence in terms of living in a shared world and socially negotiated through shared perspectives with others (Crotty, 1998). There is thus no single reality but reality defined and socially constructed from multiple perspectives, which is highly variable. Additionally, knowledge, in the mind of a qualitative researcher, is constructed, rather than discovered (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, society is a web of communication or interaction, the reciprocal influence of persons taking each other into account as they act (Stryker & Vryan, 2006). Stryker and Vryan also state that symbolic interactionism focuses on the ways we learn to interpret and give meaning to the world through our interactions with others. This conceptual framework thus facilitated a better understanding of the subjective meanings the participants construct and attribute to symbols expressed verbally and non-verbally in their contexts.

Symbolic interaction requires an interpretive process to take place (Mead, 1934). People are symbolic creatures who can interpret and talk about their inner experiences,

such as their thoughts or desires, which enables communication and interaction with others. The three major premises upon which symbolic interactionism rests are (Blumer, 1969): (1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the thing or object (physical, social, abstract) have for them; (2) the meaning of things is derived from the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and (3) these meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things s/he encounters. According to the above premises, culture, as a system of meaningful symbols, serves as a guide for acting and for interpreting our experiences. Ascribing meanings to things, interaction with those things, and the interpretation of actions undertaken accordingly are fundamental to symbolic interactionism. The theory implies that if groups in society attribute similar meanings to things or objects and interpret them accordingly, the interaction is mutually understood.

Symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective is a sub-field of constructivism that focuses on social interactionism, which allows researchers to explore how individuals from distinct social groups develop a concept of self and social identities through interaction (Spradley, 1979). Here, culture and values, role understanding, sense of efficacy, personality characteristics, expectations, communication skills, knowledge of children, professional knowledge and skills of the teacher and parent are considered. Individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, developing subjective, varied, and multiple meanings of their experiences that are often negotiated socially and historically, which lead the researcher to look for the complexity of views (Creswell, 2007; Crotty, 1998). Symbolic interactionism is a theory of meaning and is a specific methodology designed for the investigation of meaning (Spradley, 1979).

Symbolic interactionism was thus adopted for this study as conceptual and theoretical framework to gain a better understanding of the subjective and interpretative meanings of the interactions and experiences of the participants.

Qualitative Multi-Case Study

A multi-case study design was chosen to explore the subjective interpretative meanings the elementary teachers and the Ethiopian immigrant parents construct about their interactions and experiences around a child's learning. This approach can be used when the researcher desires to confirm the results attained from one case with other cases (Yin, 2012). Multiple case studies include two or more cases within the same study, each being selected so that they replicate each other and either predicts similar results or contrasting results for predictable reasons. Multiple cases are powerful means by which to create theory because they permit replication and extension among individual cases, that is, individual cases can be used for independent corroboration of specific propositions and corroboration helps the researcher to perceive patterns more easily and to eliminate chance associations, allowing the researcher to draw a more complete theoretical picture (Eisenhardt, 1991). Within the intrinsic multi-case study, a researcher creates "rich, thick descriptions" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29), and the "interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case" (Stake, 1995, p.102). The goal of this study was to create a detailed account of every aspect of each case and the cross-cases studied as defined through the experiences of the participants and analyzed by the researcher.

Qualitative research is based on the premise that "meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world" (Merriam, 2002, p. 3), and

provides an avenue for exploring these issues with the goal of deep understanding (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) defines four characteristics of qualitative study:

1. Understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants'... or insider's perspective;
2. Having the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis involving fieldwork;
3. Employing an inductive research strategy which builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses or theories;
4. Creating a final product that is richly descriptive (pp. 7-8).

A naturalistic inquiry method, that seeks to describe, understand, or interpret daily life experiences and structures based on field observations (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1999), was used in this study. This is in line with the notion of qualitative research approach that focuses on interpretation of phenomena in their natural settings to make sense of the meanings people bring to these settings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), which encourages openness to emerging data throughout the data collection and analysis process. This approach allowed for the researcher to gain insight into the diverse experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Rational for Choosing Elementary Schools

The rational for choosing elementary level was for several reasons (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011): First, elementary teachers are charged with contributing to academic, social, emotional, and behavioral development of children. Therefore, understanding teachers' interpretations of their experiences with immigrant families, and how immigrant families in turn experience teachers and school in general, can enhance chances for academic success in childhood as well as adolescence and later years. Second, there is currently far more research on immigrant students in secondary school

than there is on students at the elementary level. Crosnoe and Turley (2011) also report that this lack of balance is problematic for a number of reasons:

> First, the greater returns to investment in early education compared with later stages of schooling make elementary school, especially the primary grades, a critical point of intervention. Thus, the relative lack of interest in elementary school means that researchers have not paid enough attention to what may be a key period for immigrants. Second, the immigrant population is growing younger, making it all the more important to shift research attention to elementary schools. Third, the immigration bias already noted in secondary school data means that early schooling data may be more representative of the immigrant population…, elementary school data do have limitations, but their improvement on immigration bias is a clear strength. Fourth, given the cumulative nature of instruction and learning, a fuller understanding of secondary school patterns can be achieved by examining their potential origins in elementary school (p. 138-39).

Elementary education is a blue print for the subsequent education of children and thus it was a sound reason to focus on the interactions and experiences of elementary teachers and parents as it relates to and impacts a child's learning. There was even more purpose for a study when parents come from different backgrounds of language, culture, and experiences from those of their children's teachers. It was thus important and timely to explore the participants' perspectives of the subject in case.

Sample Selection

The participants of this study included one African American female teacher, one Hispanic female teacher, and one European American female teacher as well as two Ethiopian immigrant mothers and one married couple (a mother and a father), a total of four parents. Each parent-teacher pair was selected from three different elementary schools in the same school district. The parent-teacher dyads were selected for potential contribution to the study for their experiences with the select Ethiopian children. This study provided the opportunity to shed light on and learn from the multiple perspectives of the different racial cases, and the participants were not representatives of their racial

groups. Since each participant was a case and the purpose was to discover, understand, and gain insight into each case, generalizing from each case to their respective racial groups was not the primary concern and it could be problematic.

Purposive sampling technique, which is most effective when one needs to study a certain cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within (Tongco, 2007), was employed for its "relevance to the research question, analytical framework, and explanation or account being developed in the research." (Schwandt, 2007, p. 269). Relevance in this study was a matter of choosing multiple places, cases, or sites to facilitate the understanding of the interactions, actions, and experiences of the research participants. Likewise, Creswell (2007, p. 125) states that "the inquirer selects purposive sampling because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study." Convenience sampling, a type of purposive sampling, was used to invite the participants to participate in the study because they were conveniently available with regard to access, location, willingness (Creswell, 2007) as well as parent and teacher duos over a child. The University of Northern Colorado's Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained through the IRBNet dissertation proposal approval system (see Appendix A). However, the school district's approval was not included in the appendices to ensure the confidentiality of research site.

Data Collection

Emergent design methodology that allows for modifying the research as new issues become apparent or questions and data collection techniques to be refined based on new information (Merriam, 1998; 2002; Stake, 1995) was employed in this study. Data collection at the selected schools and analysis began as soon as Institutional Review

Board (IRB) approval was obtained. Documentation and archival records from the selected schools' websites, the school district, and state gave valuable background information to the study.

Data from the Participants

Data from interviews with the participants, and data from observation of the participants' conferences as well as the researcher's field notes and journals as identified by Yin (2012) were essential sources of data in this study. Data source triangulation was used to confirm the data from different sources (Stake, 1995, p. 112). Data triangulation was necessary to determine if what was recorded and observed in one context remained the same in another context. The participants were interviewed about their experiences, relationships, communication, collaboration, specific actions and incidents, knowledge, and expectations related to their partnership efforts for the select Ethiopian child's learning. The parents' narratives (Appendices E, F, and G) shade light on their exodus from Ethiopia and settlement in the U.S., which was used as a backdrop to the interview data. Researcher's autobiography (Appendix H) gives the researcher's personal and work experiences as an immigrant, teacher, and cultural liaison.

Semi-structured interview method that is structured with the flexibility to ask subsequent questions (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998) was the most useful method for data collection from the participants about their perspectives of their relationships and partnerships with each other. Six 45 to 60 minute face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participants throughout the duration of the study as well as three observations of the participants' conferences. Initial, mid and final interviews were conducted throughout the study face-to-face, on the phone, and through email conversations. The data from interviews were corroborated using data from observations, which were

conducted before and/or after the interviews. The researcher's field notes and journals were useful tools throughout the data collection and analysis process. All of the interviews were recorded onto tape recording device so as to facilitate the transcription of the content. After the transcriptions were complete, the data of each case were analyzed and then the cross-case analysis were made that resulted in major themes. The interview questions targeted participants' personal and background information, teacher and student and teacher and parent relationships and partnerships as well as parent and student relationships. School/district and policy-focused questions were also asked.

Initial parent interview questions are listed below:

1. Why, how, and when did you come to the United States?
2. What prompted that decision?
3. How is life and work t/here?
4. Tell me about a typical day in your life and work. Describe the contexts of your daily routines.
5. Describe your past experiences with schools.
6. What resources, knowledge and skills do you have to support you with your goals for your child's academic and social success?
7. What social networks and support groups do you have to support you with your goals for your child's academic and social success?
8. Do you have community/learning center that you can take your child after school or on the weekends?
9. Would you still come to the U.S. had you known the life experiences you have had as an immigrant?

Initial teacher interview questions are as follow:

1. When did you decide to go into teaching?
2. What prompted that decision?
3. What do you see as the purpose of education?

4. How does family or community enter into how you think about teaching?

5. How much does family or community play into the work that gets done in your classroom?

6. Tell me about this particular Ethiopian student in your classroom this past year (challenges/strengths they may have). (Probe for ideas presented)

7. If there are challenges, provide examples, explain what you have done about the challenges, and what you think might have done differently?

8. What is it like to teach and relate to the child? (Probe here for concrete examples)

9. How would you describe this student's current academic performance?

10. What are your expectations for the student and how would you like his/her parents to support the child's learning?

11. What information do you have about the student's educational background, culture, and family background? What more would you like to learn?

12. What forms of communication and relationships appear to best support student learning?

13. How do you encourage this particular Ethiopian student to discuss school and homework with his/her family?

14. How do you help this particular Ethiopian student and his/her family to understand the school/class rules and homework expectations, including positive supports?

The initial interviews were expanded on through probing for further information in a friendly conversational manner in order to make the interviews less intimidating to the participants and more of learning events for the researcher. Some of the words and phrases the researcher used for the follow-up interviews with the participants included: "Tell me a little more about . . ."; "Describe . . ."; "Elaborate upon . . ."; "What is it like . . .?;. "How do you . . .?"; "How often . . .?."

Documents and Archival Records

Documentation and archival records from the school, district, state, and the U.S. Department of Education provided basic information about the school information, the student demographics and the characteristics of the staff, and the district enrollment data that gave vital background to the research. The documentation and archival records portion of the multi-case study were staff characteristics of the district in terms of teachers' qualifications, the district enrollment data, and English Language Learner (ELL) population demographics of the school district in the 2013-2014 academic year, which were collected during the first couples of weeks before the interviews and observations. The researcher made follow-up investigations of the documentation and archival records throughout the study to seek for more information. Data collection through observations and semi-structured conversational interviews were continued until the researcher reached the data saturation stage. Data saturation is the point in data collection when no new or relevant information emerges with respect to the newly constructed theory (Given, 2008), and hence, a researcher looks at this as the point at which no more data need to be collected.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis as well as data collection in qualitative research is recursive and dynamic, and analysis becomes more intensive as the study progresses, and once all the data are in (Merriam, 1998). Similarly, Stake (1995) states that "analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p.71). Therefore, data were analyzed throughout the data collection phase by making sense of

the results and notes taken from interviews, observations, field notes as well as researcher journal. It is imperative that the data gained from observations, interviews, field notes, researcher journals, and the like are triangulated in qualitative research. According to Stake (1995), there are two ways in which researchers can find meaning from cases, which are direct interpretation of the data and categorical aggregation of the data. The researcher triangulated the data gained from interviews and observations as well as field notes and researcher journals (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Then, the researcher developed the triangulated data and coded themes throughout the data collection phase based on the type of interaction or data source from which the theme is noted. Both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation are necessary in analyzing and synthesizing the data collected (Stake, 1995), which were employed in the present study. The researcher was most interested in the relationships to the question being asked: What are the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children? Categorical aggregation was given more emphasis although the researcher also made use of direct interpretation.

All data collected were useful for sorting interviews and observations into meaningful categories (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Interview data were digitally recorded and transcribed to assist with the development of themes and categories. Those developed categories were the basis for the reader to make meaning and generalize from the information contained in them. The researcher employed Spradley (1979) approach to domain, taxonomic, and contrastive analyses to identify themes that emerge from observations and interviews with teachers and parents. This approach allowed for the

contrastive analysis of the three cases, which helped to identify divergent information from different data sources quickly in the data gathering process. The researcher then analyzes the data collected through description of the case and themes of the case. When needed, a graphic organizer was used to facilitate the process of aggregating and disaggregating the data and for ease of representing the data. The data were also digitally recorded and transcribed to assist with the development of themes and categories.

Validity

Without rigor, research is worthless and loses its value and thus reliability and validity are concepts used for attaining rigor in qualitative research (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2008). Validity in qualitative research is determined by the believability of knowledge claim based upon the body of evidence gathered through the data collection and analysis of the research. It was necessary that the conclusions drawn from the research were entirely based upon the body of evidence. Therefore, data source triangulation, which is the process of strengthening the findings obtained from a qualitative inquiry by cross-checking information, was utilized to confirm the data collected, analyzed, and the conclusions made in the study (Stake, 1995). Data from interviews were validated with observations, field notes, member checks, and researcher's journal in order to provide full, recurring evidence about the actions and behaviors of the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children from which solid conclusions were made. Member checks consisted of informant feedback that the researcher used to help improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the findings.

The general notion of validity concerns the believability of a statement or knowledge claim, and thus attention to the judgments about the validity of research-generated knowledge claims is integral to all social science research (Polkinghorne, 2007). Therefore, besides triangulation, reflexivity, peer review, member checking, and longer period of time strategies were used to enhance internal validity of qualitative research, which Polkinghorne states validity allows for gradations in the confidence readers can have on proposed knowledge claims. Polkinghorne believes that the storied descriptions people give about the meaning they attribute to life events is the best evidence, but they have limitations and threats to their validity of which researchers need to recognize in making interpretations and in arguing for support of their knowledge claims. The researcher was aware of this and took extra caution to grasp the actual meaning experienced by the participants during the data collection and analysis process of the present study, and any threats or limits to validity of this research is refuted. However, as Polkinghorne (2007) concludes, the readers can make the judgment about the plausibility of a knowledge claim based on the evidence and argument for the claim reported by the researcher. The researcher utilized various strategies for corroborating the data and took extended time to consult with the research advisor, and used professional editors in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data and the pertaining findings of the study.

Reliability

To ensure reliability, which calls attention to dependability and trustworthiness of the research findings, the researcher adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) approach which emphasizes "dependability" or "consistency" of the results. Reliability in this framework

is achieved by strictly adhering to the research procedures, which include how data are collected, how categories are derived, and how decisions are made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 1998, p. 206). Human behavior is not static, and that there is no one reality that will consistently provide exactly the same results if replicated (Merriam, 1998). The goal of social research is to "describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it" (Merriam, 1998, p. 205), which would not yield the same result as people construct their own reality and give interpretative meanings of their complex worlds.

Summary

This chapter describes the qualitative research design and multi-case study method with a sample of three elementary teachers and four Ethiopian immigrant parents paired for an Ethiopian child who were selected for their potential participation and contribution to the present study. The researcher took constructivist stance and approached the study from the symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective, which views individuals as shaped through their interactions with others, and their interpretations of these interactions as based on their contexts and cultures (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Using a multi-case design and in-depth interviews, observations, field notes, and researcher journals as data gathering tools, the researcher captured a detailed picture of the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. The participants included three racially and ethnically diverse teachers and three ethnically diverse Ethiopian immigrant parents from three elementary schools, each teacher and parent paired for an Ethiopian child.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

Introduction

The findings of this study enhance our understanding of the perspectives of diverse elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. From data collection and analysis of each case and cross-cases significant findings emerged that are presented in a format that highlights the themes. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

Q1 What are the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children?

a. What expectations do parents bring to this relationship from previous school-parent experiences?

b. What are the chief areas of concern expressed by parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed?

c. What has helped parents and teachers to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships and how they negotiate their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds?

This chapter provides overview of the present research context in terms of the school district, schools, and participants, as well as rationale for choosing participants at the elementary level. The names of the district, schools, and participants in this study are pseudonyms to protect their identities and privacies.

The findings of this study demonstrate the following: (a) there was similarity across cases regarding lack of teacher preparation in working with diverse students; (b) barriers to communication between parents and teachers include language and cultural differences and parents' invisibility in schools; (c) parents are unfamiliar with the Special Education IEP (Individualized Education Program) and resist it; (d) as a result of living in different countries and speaking multiple languages, some Ethiopian parents have knowledge and forms of cultural capital that could be leveraged in schools-community partnerships; (e) Ethiopian parents can bring social views shaped by stratified class relations in their home country, to their assessments of educators in the United States; (f) parent views of teacher behaviors can influence Ethiopian student attitudes toward teachers as well as their behavior in the classroom; and (g) the district cultural liaisons are instrumental in facilitating communication and collaboration between parents and teachers. These seven themes will be discussed after the description of the context of the study and cases. Each of these themes will be illustrated through quotes from the participants that illuminate the importance of each theme as it relates to the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children.

The District

The context for this study is a large school district in the rocky mountain region. The school district covers 108 square miles and includes 11 different zip codes. There are 66 schools/programs in the district, which include 43 elementary, thirteen middle, and seven high schools. The District serves about 54,000 students with its about 7,500 employees.

The participants were purposefully chosen from Title I elementary schools that serve many immigrant children and their families. The elementary schools in the district have Title I Parent Involvement Policy in place along with the School/Parent Compact to encourage parental involvement in family literacy through school and district activities (Title I Parent Involvement Policy: KBA, 2003; School-Level Title I Parent Involvement Policy, Exhibit: KB-E-1, 2003). The policies require that the district shall provide coordination, technical assistance and other support necessary to assist participating schools in building capacity for strong parent involvement and in planning and implementing effective parental involvement activities to improve student academic achievement and school performance. It is also district policy that to the extent feasible and appropriate, the district shall coordinate and integrate parent involvement programs and activities with Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, and the Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters. Furthermore, the Parents as Teachers Program, and district preschool and other programs are included in the policy. The policy even requires that the district conducts other activities, such as parent resource centers, that encourage and support parents in more fully participating in the education of their students.

According to the district's Title I Parent Involvement Policy, parent involvement activities in the schools include opportunities for parents to volunteer and engage in school activities; to provide home support for their child's education; and to participate in school decision-making. The schools also must provide staff development and parent education and must ensure effective communication between the school and parents.

Also, all information related to school and parent programs, meetings and other activities must be sent to parents in a language the parents can understand.

Table 1

Demographics of the School District's ELL Population, 2013-2014 A.Y.

Student Background	ELL	% of ELL Population	Non-ELL	% Non-ELL
Free & Reduced Lunch	3,345	60.44	10,039	20.92
Gifted Talented	107	1.93	3,979	8.29
Migrant	8	.15	0	0
Special Education	521	9.41	4,886	10.18
Non-English Proficient	640	11.56		
Limited English Proficient	3,361	60.37		
Fluent English Proficient	1,533	27.70		

Note. Student Population (n = 53,529), English Language Learner [ELL (n=5,345).

The total student population of 53,529 in the district, the number of total English language learner (ELL) is 5,534, which is 10.33% of the total population. The ELL population, who are primarily immigrants, are 61% Limited English Proficient (LEP), 11% Non-English Proficient (NEP), and 27.70 % Fluent English Proficient (FEP) as indicated in Table 2. From the district student demographics and languages represented, the number of Ethiopian Amharic language speakers is 275, which is 0.51%. This figure was only accurate if all the language population reported their respective language, as their primary and home language, which among Ethiopians is primarily Amharic, Oromo, and/or Tigrigna. There are actually more than what is reported as there are significant numbers of parents who choose English as their home language when they register their children in the district.

Table 2

Languages Represented in the School District, 2013-2014 AY

Languages	Total Student Population	% of Student Population
English	46, 280	86.46
Spanish	3,290	6.15
Korean	519	0.97
Arabic	487	0.91
Russian	414	0.77
Vietnamese	280	0.52
Amharic	275	0.51
Chinese, Mandarin	245	0.46
Chinese, Cantonese	119	0.22
Other	1,620	3.03

The ELL population is mainly from immigrant families and the Ethiopian immigrant parents' children is 0.51% as represented by the Amharic language (see Table 2), a figure which is not accurate as the two other major Ethiopian languages like Oromo and Tigrigna have not been included in the figure and also many other Ethiopians in the district report English as their primary and home language. In order to ensure parent communication, the school district has fulltime cultural liaisons on support staff for its top eight languages (Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Somali, and Vietnamese). The district cultural liaisons are bilinguals and multi-linguals, and they support district and school staff, especially the ELL students and their parents.

The Schools

Bradley, Mile High, Union (pseudonyms) elementary schools serve diverse student population in grades K- 5, which the participant teachers say they enjoy. The schools have student populations that represent a multitude of cultures found in many countries. With over 26 different languages spoken in each school ranging from Spanish to Amharic and Tigrinya, one can envision the cross-cultural collaboration that occurs on

a daily basis at each school. The schools are unique communities with a large number of English language learners.

The three elementary schools included in the study were housed in old buildings in suburban neighborhoods surrounded by old and old townhomes, affordable apartments/flats, gas stations, local convenient stores and coffee shops. Data from the schools' websites show that the student population in each school is from 580 to 600 from kindergarten through 5th grades. The student demographics in each school constitute European-Americans, the contemporary immigrants from Africa and African Americans, Asians and Asian-Americans, Hispanic and Native American. Just over 60% of the students in each school is eligible for free and reduced lunch. While the ethnically and culturally diverse population in each school ranges from 70%-80% on the average, the schools' staffs that ranges from 50 to 60 teachers are majority European American with a few African American and Hispanic teachers in each school, and the administrators are also European Americans.

According to data from the schools' websites, each of the selected schools claim to strive to celebrate diversity and are committed to excellence and equity— a commitment to equity and a dedication to the inclusion and support of individuals from all groups that encompass the characteristics of each school community. Towards this end, the schools offer a variety of programs and opportunities that they believe enrich the academic experience of all of students. These programs include English Language Acquisition, Reading Intervention, School-Wide Title I programs, an Individualized Learning Center for the multi-handicapped students, and Gifted/Talented. All the schools are proud to be rich in diversity, uncommon in most schools in the District.

The schools are engaged in what they call "transformation efforts," which refers to a joint efforts of parents, teachers, administrators, and community members working together in order to promote the success of all students. In order to ensure this, the schools offer a program called Partnership with Academically Successful Students (PASS), which seeks to bridge the cultural gap between the school and community members. PASS Teams are comprised of parents and educators who participate together in training and professional learning to promote the success of students. Additionally, PASS is charged with identifying community resources that can be used to support students' academic success. It also involves community members and school planning and advisory processes, with the goal of improving relations between teachers, parents and families. In addition to the PASS program, the schools have Parent Teacher Community Organization (PTCO) and Parent Advisory Accountability Committee (PAAC) for the discussion of district accountability, district equity initiatives, and school safety.

The Cases

Individual interviews and observations of parent-teacher meetings were the primary data sources. All the participant teachers had experience teaching and relating to the Ethiopian immigrant children and their parents, and they all had more than five years of teaching experience in general. One of the teachers was recognized in the district with respect to positively and effectively teaching and collaborating with the culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families. Separately discussing parent-teacher relationships and their perceptions of each other would not adequately reflect the complexity of the phenomena as doing so will only give partial information. Therefore,

the multiple cases were conceptualized and analyzed using three cases of parent-teacher dyads, as describe below.

This study adopted a cross-cases analytical methodology in order to highlight the commonalities as well as uniqueness of the three cases after each case was analyzed separately. Each parent-teacher dyad was first presented as a case, which was followed by the cross-case analysis. The data consisted of three audio recorded interviews at the beginning of the study (which I transcribed) and field notes from observations of meetings. The researcher interpreted the research situation according to the thoughts and feelings that arose in context during the actual setting of the observations. Therefore, readers should not assume an objective reality, and they are encouraged to relate to the data with their own interpretations. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

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b. What are the chief areas of concern expressed by parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed?

c. What has helped parents and teachers to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships and how they negotiate their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds?

The purpose of this chapter is to identify, summarize, and present the major themes that emerged from data analyses. The analytical procedure followed Spradley's (1979) model, which includes first conducting domain analyses that involves a search for the larger units of a cultural knowledge called domains, which are the basic units in an

informant's cultural knowledge. This was followed by the taxonomic analysis, which is a hierarchy of terms associated with each of the cover terms for the identified domains when needed. The researcher also conducted a componential analysis when needed, which reveals contradictions and tensions between individuals and the cultures within which they are acting. The findings represent a systematic undertaking of analysis that captured major domains from the data, and include rich contextualization including field notes and direct quotes from the participants.

Background on Ethiopian Immigrant Families

The political environment Ethiopian immigrant parents come from, including the migration history and some reasons for why they have immigrated to the U.S. are important points to understand. Ethiopians come from Monarchical leadership in which Haile Selassie, who ruled from 1930 to 1974, was symbolic. He was deposed by a bloody junta in 1974. The Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front (EPDRF) overthrew the regime in 1991 and it has been the ruling party in Ethiopia since then.

The Ethiopians migration history to the U.S. reveals the political context of the country, and there are three major phases of migration: (1) The Haile Selassie era, which people commonly express nostalgia of good old days, is the first wave of migration between 1959-1970s, and the immigrants were elites and university students who came to study and/or work in the U.S. universities. (2) The second wave is during the military junta from 1975-1991 and they were refugees and asylees who fled the dictatorship and death. (3) The third wave is from 1991-to the present and the migration was due to the ethnic conflict of the 1990's and the diversity visa lottery. Ethnic conflicts and the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea are reasons for refugees coming to the U.S. from either

country during the 1990's. Eritreans share similar culture with Ethiopian Tigre in the north as Eritrea was a region in the very north Ethiopia. Now days, while marriage, family reunion, and invitation of extended families like parents and siblings are also major ways to come to the U.S. for Ethiopians. Some of them also come for graduate studies in U.S. universities. The number of Ethiopians and Eritreans reside the rocky mountain region is estimated to be 30,000.

Transition

Data from the interviews with parents revealed some of the barriers Ethiopian immigrants face in transitioning to the U.S. as discussed in this section. The transitional barriers include cultural differences, language barrier, homesickness, struggle with responsibilities of nuclear and extended families as well as work two to three jobs to meet the family demands. Additionally, their great expectations of the "American Dream" and the reality they face in terms of the nature of work and life, incongruent parent-teacher relationship and partnership expectations, lack of understanding of how the U.S. school system functions, little and poor academic background, as well as lack of instrumental skills like driving contribute to their invisibility in schools and lack of communication and partnership with their children's teachers.

Furthermore, some Ethiopian parents face difficulties in their host family home in the U.S. in terms of expectation and reality, relationship, friendship, and expectations of male and female roles in Ethiopia and the United States, which can impact their transition and adjustment process, which in turn can impact their children's learning emotionally, socially, and economically. If parents do not get the support and encouragement they need from their close family members and/or friends, they may find it hard to benefit

from the social capital of their family members, friends, and/or the community networks that already exist.

Case One: Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria

This section presents the case of Mrs. Kitile, Obsa's mother, and Mrs. Maria, Obsa's Kindergarten teacher. Profiles of Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria (pseudonyms) are presented first, followed by an analysis of the researcher's observation of a parent-teacher meeting, and description of their respective perceptions of parent-teacher relations.

Table 3

Profiles of Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria

	Pseudonym and Age	
Data Category	Mrs. Kitile; Age 34	Mrs. Maria; Age 37
Educational background	One year of college	Bachelor of Arts Degree
Current occupation and years of experience	Bradley Gas Station attendant, 2 years	Elementary teacher, 7 years
Previous occupation	Housewife (before coming to U.S.)	7-Eleven store cashier (before coming into teaching)
Race/ethnicity	Black-American, Oromo	Hispanic
Languages	Oromo, Amharic, English	English, Spanish
Years lived in the U.S.	2	37
Child, child's grade level, and school	Obsa, Kindergarten, Bradley Elementary	Obsa, Kindergarten, Bradley Elementary

Mrs. Kitile

Mrs. Kitile comes from Oromo ethnic group and she speaks Oromo language (an Afro-Asiatic language, which is the most widely spoken tongue in the family's Cushitic branch). She also speaks Amharic (a Semitic language spoken in Ethiopia), and some English. Mrs. Kitile, together with her husband Mr. Abdi and their son Obsa, came to the United States on a Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery. Mrs. Kitile comes from a working class SES (Socio-Economic Stats) in Ethiopia, and she works in a general labor sector of service provider in the United States.

Background Data on Mrs. Maria

Mrs. Maria is a teacher from a Hispanic, immigrant working class background in California. She is married with two children, ages three and five. Before beginning her teaching career, Mrs. Maria worked as a gas station attendant and as a cashier at a 7 Eleven store while going to college in California for a teaching degree. She hopes to impact the Hispanic community and the many vulnerable immigrant children and their families in her school. Mrs. Maria has had a teaching experience in diverse school districts in California and in the Denver metro area. She has taught in ethnically, socially, economically diverse elementary schools including Title I schools.

Mrs. Maria brings different social, racial, ethnic, class, and language proficiencies to her relationship with Mrs. Kitile, which shapes her partnership efforts for Obsa's learning. Mrs. Maria is a Hispanic woman who was born and raised in the U.S. She speaks Spanish besides English, and she has college degree in elementary education. She is a parent of two.

In the interview with Mrs. Maria, she says that she strives to educate the "minority" majority children in her school. She remembers her own childhood experience as follows:

> I grew up in an urban setting in California and experienced mingling mainly with a Hispanic community as well as Blacks and Asians communities. Some refugees are moving in the area and it is a bit different now. Here in Colorado, I've experienced a significant course of my career, seven years. I have Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and I think the big change for me is the language barrier, which is a big difference. I used to teach more of Hispanic population in California. Language stands out as a communication barrier with African immigrants like from Ethiopia. The barrier is with students and families. In the past, I worked with fluent parents in English or at least semi fluent besides my Hispanic families. Now, for example, English is even harder for Mrs. Kitile when she asks questions just like it is hard for me to understand her. But I enjoyed working with diverse families like from Ethiopia, Kenya, Congo, etc. and I learned some places and things that I didn't know before. I respect and value diversity and I don't judge others. But I give them opportunities to express who they are as a person and student.

Mrs. Maria comes from an immigrant family herself and she grew up in California where she states that she was exposed to diversity. She indicates that her exposure to diversity has helped her to work in her current school that is racially and ethnically diverse, and believes that it is an opportunity to teach a diverse student population, to get to know their parents, and to learn from their diverse backgrounds like Obsa and his parents. However, when she described her past training on how to effectively function with contemporary African immigrants as a teacher, she indicated that she did not take a course on immigrants and diversity.

Mrs. Maria believes that it is important to not judge others and not project her beliefs and values over her students, as stated in the following:

> I keep my religion and ways of celebrating things quiet. I just share about my family, pets, etc. to build trust. You know…kids ask, and I am conscious about cultural differences and one way is not right and that is what I encourage. It is tough with the kids. I tell them that we all are different and otherwise the world

> would be very boring. I encourage embracing cultural differences and, in general, I am definitely more conscious when it comes to diversity and I encourage kids to ask questions and share their stories.

In the above excerpt, Mrs. Maria reveals that there are different belief and value systems in the world, and that she tries to teach her students understanding and respect. By doing so, she believes that she encourages and teaches her students to be able to appreciate the diversity in school and in their lives.

Observation Data from Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria's Meeting

Bradley Elementary School is located near major intersecting roads, a park, shopping centers and convenient stores, and a car garage. The school is surrounded by old town homes and apartments from where mainly Hispanic and Black American, and African immigrant students walk to the school. It is a Friday busy morning for the school. Obsa, a kindergartener, and does not want Mrs. Maria to be his teacher anymore; instead, he wants Mrs. Margaret who is a European-American to be his teacher. Mrs. Kitile meets with Mrs. Maria.

Obsa's refusal to go to Mrs. Maria's classroom became an issue that set a stage for Mrs. Kitile to meet with Mrs. Maria. Obsa and Mrs. Kitile initially mentioned in the meeting that "Mrs. Maria yells at Obsa" and it bothers and scares him to go to her classroom. But it was revealed later in the meeting that Obsa's refusal to be in Mrs. Maria's classroom resulted from Mrs. Maria changing his seat to the front row in the classroom. Obsa did not like the change because of the noise from the hallways and a disruptive student sitting by him. As cultural liaison, the researcher was invited to be an observer in the meeting and to facilitate communication and mutual understanding with

respect to language and school expectations. The researcher was anxious to learn the participants' perceptions about their relationship.

The first words spoken in the meeting were the following by Mrs. Maria: "Ok, what's going on?" Mrs. Kitile takes a deep breath and says, "You call his name and scream at my child, you don't care…you know…last time I come back to your class, you don't say anything…you don't look at me". Mrs. Maria, with a sad tone of voice, turns to me and then to Mrs. Maria, and says:

> What do you mean screaming? I don't scream. I care about every child in my classroom. When you retuned to the classroom last time, I was in the middle of teaching and I didn't have a chance to talk to you. I don't yell, I don't scream and screaming is something different. If they talk about my high voice, I'm sorry I will pay attention when I talk to Obsa. But I doubt if Obsa clearly understood the purpose of the incentive his mother was giving him—he may think she [Mrs. Kitile] was affirming his dislike of her classroom when she took him home and bought him candies when he cried in the classroom.

Mrs. Kitile responds, "I want he go school. I buy the candy and say no cry in school. He say don't like the teacher because she yell and scare him". Mrs. Maria turns to Obsa talks to him with a soft voice. Mrs. Maria: "How're you feeling, Obsa?" Obsa: "Hmmm…I don't know." Mrs. Maria: "Do you like school?" Obsa: "No."Mrs. Maria: "Why?" Obsa: "It's loud." Mrs. Maria: "What part of the school is loud?" Obsa: "The hallways." Mrs. Maria: "Where else is loud?" Obsa: "The classroom." Mrs. Maria: "What's loud in the classroom, Obsa?" Obsa: "The students" Mrs. Kitile: In Amharic, "Tell the truth; don't hide". Mrs. Maria: Gazes first at Obsa's mother and then at me. Mrs. Maria: "Obsa, am I loud in the classroom?" Obsa: Nods.

Obsa's Story, according to Mrs. Kitile. While Mrs. Maria was gazing quietly at Mrs. Kitile, Obsa, and me, Mrs. Kitile started telling us about Obsa's background. She recounted that Obsa is more like a mature adult than a child, that he is different from

other children. He has a sharp memory: "Two years ago we went to Ethiopia and he remembers the details about people and places—he's very smart." He is also unforgiving, like his father: "His father…you know…if people hurt him, he will very much be disappointed and he hardly forgets and moves on." Mrs. Kitile goes on to explain that Obsa is disappointed that Mrs. Maria called his name and yelled at him. He cried and did not want to be in Mrs. Maria classroom anymore. The perceived yelling caused him shame:

> I think he's also embarrassed that the teacher yell to him and it's hard for him to join his classmates. But he's afraid to tell the truth to the teacher. I care about him and I don't care how the teacher feels about. I don't want my child's future ruined from now.

Mrs. Kitile gives background information to Obsa's personality indicating that Obsa, like his father, does not easily get over his disappointment. She states that Obsa did not want to be in Mrs. Maria's classroom because he is disappointed at her and he could not get over it easily. Mrs. Maria informs Mrs. Kitile that it is impossible for Obsa to switch teacher at this time of the school year, and also she suggests that Mrs. Kitile be firm about Obsa's going to school regardless of who the teacher is. When Mrs. Maria asks Mrs. Kitile what she needs from her as a teacher and/or from the school to help her with so that Obsa will be happy in her classroom and at school, Mrs. Kitile states that Mrs. Maria "yells" at Obsa, and that she needs to apologize and be mindful of her words and actions in the future. Mrs. Maria feels bad about what happened, apologizes to Obsa and Mrs. Kitile and affirms that she will try her best to speak to him gently and slowly.

Reflection on the Observation

Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria did not greet each other when they first met. Mrs. Maria started talking business when she came to us in the waiting room. The conference

was about Obsa's refusing to go to Mrs. Maria's classroom because he was disappointed at her. Mrs. Kitile seemed unfriendly, angry, and emotional about Obsa's rough school experience, which she attributes to Mrs. Maria's negative action and behavior. The meeting was emotionally charged on both sides. The teacher asked the parent how she could help to resolve the issue. There were nonverbal cues, subtle nuances and/or behaviors exhibited from both sides in the meeting, which were symbolic and meaningful in the context in terms of lack of trust and uncertainty about the next steps to ensure Obsa's learning. The teacher and the parent did not have a plan for follow-up communication in face to face, phone, letter, etc. and they also did not put a future goal in place to work on the issue. The last tone of the conference was discouraging because Obsa still refused to attend his teacher's classroom after the meeting.

Analysis and Interpretation of the Data

A taxonomic analysis (Spradley, 1979) of the observation and interview data revealed the characteristics of an "uncaring teacher," from Mrs. Kitile's perspective. The terms "yelling," "bossy," "keeps distance," "intimidating," and "unfriendly" were words used by Obsa, which were communicated to the researcher during my interview with his mother. From the taxonomic analysis of Mrs. Kitile's and Obsa's words, the researcher created these follow-up questions to ask Mrs. Kitile:

1. How do gesture and tone of voice describe an uncaring teacher?
2. How do assuming and judging describe an uncaring teacher?
3. Do judging and assuming mean the same thing to you, or are they different?
4. How does ignoring describe an uncaring teacher?

Mrs. Kitile was concerned that Mrs. Maria did not pay full attention to Obsa's difficult classroom situation, which she says is disrespect to the child and the parent. Mrs. Kitile drops Obsa in his classroom and as she leaves the classroom, Obsa started crying. She returns to classroom while Mrs. Maria was teaching. Mrs. Maria continued teaching while Mrs. Kitile was standing by the classroom door, which upset Mrs. Kitile as she hoped Mrs. Maria would interrupt instruction and talk to her. Mrs. Kitile takes obsa home with her. It was noted that Mrs. Kitile's and Mrs. Maria's responses to resolve Obsa's rough classroom experience were not congruent. For example, when Obsa cried because he did not want to be in the classroom, Mrs. Kitile took him home and bought him some toys and candies to cajole him so that he would happily go back to school. However, Mrs. Maria doubted that Obsa clearly understood why Mrs. Kitile did so. In the interview with Mrs. Maria, she stated that Mrs. Kitile reinforced Obsa's negative classroom experience by taking him home and buying him toys and candies. She highlighted that Mrs. Kitile needed to be tough on Obsa and tell him that he had to go to school and not cry.

Mrs. Kitile also reveals that she is concerned about Mrs. Maria's past work as a cashier at a 7-Eleven store with a surprise and disbelief, and she comments that "customer service is different from teaching," and she revealed her perception towards the teacher as not a good teacher for her child. Mrs. Kitile perceives customer service as a non-professional job that is different from teaching, which she sees us a professional job. Therefore, behind Mrs. Kitile's thinking, as to my interpretation, was questioning Mrs. Maria's work as a teacher as she indicates that Mrs. Maria may be inept teacher because she had non-professional job. When asked to talk more about her comment of

"customer service is different from teaching," Mrs. Kitile stated that she had never thought of a teacher as coming from such a work background like that of a convenient store cashier, a job she viewed as lower in status and one that only people with less education like she and her fellow immigrants take.

In contrast, Mrs. Maria believes that building relationships with the families as well as with other staff members as resources is one of the most important roles she has as a teacher. She states that communication is critical and always being open, available, non-judgmental, and knowing the resources in the school and district is helpful. Regarding parents' situation and reaching out to them, Mrs. Maria reports:

> A lot of families work during the nights and days as well. I've not made home visit to Obsa's family, which would have been helpful, but I try to build connection with the parents through the student. I learned about Obsa and where he is coming from a lot through his stories. I hope to meet with the parents once more in this academic year.

However, although Mrs. Maria gets some background information about Obsa and his parents through Obsa's stories, she has not taken further steps to approach parents and learn from their inside home and stories. She relies on the student to serve as a link for communication between home and school.

The parents' lack of presence in school, their lack of understanding how school works and their roles at home and at school to support their child's learning were additional concerns voiced by Mrs. Maria states as follows:

> Language is the main thing getting in the way of communication, and it is hard when families are not visible in school. I've never met the dad and the mom came for last fall conference, and this is the second time she's coming to school when Obsa complained about me. She has some English but it's really difficult to communicate. I found that our school's Family Literacy Program is helpful in educating parents how school system functions in the U.S. and how they partner with school, which a lot of families don't get opportunity and/or time to get in, and they are hardly visible in the school.

Mrs. Maria thinks that attending the Family Literacy Program is important for parents, since besides learning English, it gives them time and space to become more familiar with school and to learn more about their children's education and how they are supported.

This analysis reveals that Mrs. Kitile had a very different perspective of Mrs. Maria than Mrs. Maria had of herself as for parents and Hispanic students as well as other immigrant students and their families. It was noted that there was friction and misunderstanding between Mrs. Maria and Obsa and Mrs. Kitile. As she expressed, to be disrespected by a person of such high status – the teacher – was hurtful for Mrs. Kitile. The conflict between the teacher and the parent negatively impacted the student's school life and the parent-school partnership.

Case Two: Mrs. Lemlem, Mr. Bedilu and Mrs. Aisha

This section presents the case of Mr. Bedilu and Mrs. Lemlem, Tekilu's parents, and Mrs. Aisha, Tekilu's 1st grade teacher. Personal data of Mrs. Bedilu and Mrs. Lemlem and Mrs. Aisha (pseudonyms) precede interview and observation data on their perceptions of their relationship and partnership efforts.

Table 4

Profiles of Mr. Bedilu, Mrs. Lemlem, and Mrs. Aisha

Data Category	Pseudonym; Age		
	Mr. Bedilu; 45	Mrs. Lemlem; 37	Mrs. Aisha; 39
Educational background	High school graduate	High school graduate	Master of Arts degree
Current occupation and years of experience	Baggage handler at DIA, taxi driver, 8 years	Hotel rooms cleaner, Bradley Gas Station attendant, 11 years	Elementary teacher, 7 years
Previous occupation	Truck driver	None	Professional dancer
Race/ethnicity	Black-African, Tigre	Black-African, Amara	African American
Languages	Amharic, Tigrigna, Arabic, Swahili, Malta, English	Amharic, English	English
Years in the U.S.	8	11	39
Child, child's grade level, and school	Teklu, first grade, Mile High Elementary	Teklu, first grade, Mile High Elementary	Teklu, first grade, Mile High Elementary

Mrs. Lemlem and Mr. Bedilu

Mrs. Lemlem is Amara by race, and speaks Amharic and some English with respect to multilingual proficiency. She is a black immigrant in terms of her race and social status. Like her husband, she is only high school graduate, and works as hotel rooms cleaner, and also she is a Bradley gas station attendant. Mr. Bedilu is Tigre by ethnicity and speaks Tigrigna, Amharic, Arabic, as well as some Swahili, Malta, and English in terms of multilingual fluency. He is a black refugee man from Ethiopia in

terms of his race, social status, and gender respectively. With respect to education, he only completed high school, and he works as a baggage- handler at DIA besides driving a taxi.

Both Mr. Bedilu and Mrs. Lemlem assume parent's role of meeting their children's basic needs. They state that teachers are in charge of educating their child and that they lack the necessary expertise to partner with the teacher. Additionally, language barriers and time constraints due to busy and inconvenient work schedules as are among the hurdles these parents face in their endeavor to raise and educate their children in the U.S. For example, Mr. Bedilu talked about the "American way" and the "Ethiopian way" of raising a child, a child's roles, and a parent's role in engaging in a child's learning. He comments that in Ethiopia, girls learn some skills like sewing and boys learn some labor-intensive manual skills and other trades even before they complete their secondary education. However, in America, he says, children have to go to school and focus on the academics no matter what. Mr. Bedilu believes that Teklu has a good understanding and he speaks English language at home.

Mrs. Lemlem and Mr. Bedilu indicate that it is not easy for them to understand the language and communicate with educators and also to clearly understand how the school system functions, especially the special education program Tekilu was tracked into. In spite of the fact that he speaks five other languages, Mr. Bedilu says that he is often shut down when he goes to school because of his limited English language proficiency.

Mrs. Aisha

Mrs. Aisha is Teklu's first grade classroom teacher at Mile High Elementary School. She is an African-American female in her late thirties who began teaching eight years ago after 16 years of dancing professionally, a career that spanned three states. She has Bachelor of Arts in Dance, Master of Arts in Integrated Arts, and plans to do her Doctor of Philosophy in Diversity. Mrs. Aisha mentions that although diversity is a reality in an ever changing classroom, she reveals that she did not take a course in her teacher education program. Mrs. Aisha is a Colorado native, but she has not lived all her life in Colorado. Now she lives in Denver, Colorado, which she calls home.

Mrs. Aisha comes from a dancing background. After graduating from a high school in Colorado, she lived and worked as a professional dancer in Mississippi and Chicago, and finally worked as a showgirl in Las Vegas. Being a performer in a stage show that is intended to showcase her physical attributes and voice quality paved the way for Mrs. Aisha to become a spirited elementary teacher where she transfers her attributes and quality of professional dancing to teaching.

> I dance professionally. I wanted to dance until I was 32 and that was what exactly happened. As much as I love dancing, I love teaching. Dancing, stage, voice, and movement helped me to be on a teaching stage. For me, standing in front of students is like being on the stage. Teaching is hard, and I work hard to make sure every child's learning.

Dancing was good preparation for the world of teaching. Mrs. Aisha says she has the art of teaching and knowledge of the content as well as the flexibility, the energy, and the will to educate young children. The motivation behind her teaching is that children can do better than their parents if they are educated well and work hard, a motivation she gained from her grandmother growing up. She believes the child should always do better than the parent. She reports that her grandmother raised her and her

siblings all by herself reassuring for her that she would support her as long as she was trying to do something.

Mrs. Aisha is married with a nine-year-old daughter, and her perception of family-school relations are often shaped by her dual role as mother and teacher. She grew up as the youngest child in an ambitious and loving Mississippi family with several siblings. Mrs. Aisha's parents divorced when she was only a child and her father passed away when she was two years old, and her grandmother stepped in and took full responsibility to raise and educate her. She is the first in her family to go to college and she is thankful to her maternal grandmother's selfless and enduring support and encouragement for that. She vividly recalls her grandmother's warmth and caring words of advice as she recollected her childhood and growing up, "I will always support you and help you as long as you are trying to do something", is still fresh in her mind. Mrs. Aisha chose to teach in Abyssinia Elementary School because she valued the mixture of children from various social class, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. In her words, "It is no more just Black and White, it is a collective mix and I work hard to make sure everybody is represented in my classroom." She strongly believes that school should be a place where all students are valued and recognized and teachers must understand and relate to children from a variety of backgrounds. Ethnicity along with history, experience and home community are a major piece of who she is as classroom teacher what she brings to teaching and her relationships with students and parents. Great expectations, guidance, and building relationships are characteristics that she received while growing up, which she is giving back.

Understand their backgrounds, connect with your students. Regarding understanding students' backgrounds, where students come from, Mrs. Aisha stresses that a teacher should understand the diverse backgrounds of the students and their parents. She highlights the point as follows:

> You got to understand those kids you are sitting in front of as a teacher. For example, children operate in a classroom in the same way they do at their churches. In a black Baptist church, people stand up, move around, do fellowship, and do a lot of talking and body rocking as they worship, and black children coming from such background tend to do the same in the classroom. If Johnny wants to stand up, let him stand up…you know…obviously he is the mover and active. Johnny won't sit down but I guarantee you he is hearing every single word you are saying. In a Catholic church, people stand up, hold Mary, sit down…they stand up, hold Mary, and sit down, and children coming from such background also tend to operate accordingly in the classroom—they are relatively passive.

Mrs. Aisha reports that children have their own learning styles as shaped by, for example, the way they function in their churches and they tend to operate in the same way in classroom.

Flexible, respectful, and high expectations for all. Regarding her expectations of self and others, Mrs. Aisha claims that:

> My classroom doors are open and my expectations are high, as high as mine, for all my students and their families and there is no exception. I see the family unit in Teklu's family. Teklu says that his parents work different shifts and also take care of him and his sister turn by turn. I know that they are tight family. Relatively speaking, Black American families lack this solid family intact, and it is mostly mother's voice that a child hears. In Black American families, it is mostly broken home, but I see other African immigrants are pretty intact.

Mrs. Aisha expresses that she is open and she has high expectation for all children and families. Comparatively speaking with some African American families, Mrs. Aisha reveals that contemporary immigrants from Africa she has met come from intact family

unit. She points out that Teklu's parents, for example, consult each other to support their child's learning. Mrs. Aisha recollects the following when she talks about Teklu's mother:

> Teklu's father came for last conference and his mother came for a Special Education IEP meeting. The mother calls her husband in the middle of the IEP meeting to consult with him before she makes decision. I think that the woman gives respect to the man as the leader of the house as it should be. "Man voice" is important for disciplining a child. You know…man telling kids 'you go to school and you sit down and listen to your teacher' sets a right tone for a child for appropriate behavior in a classroom. I also think respect is there for me as well and they respect me enough that I'm educating their child. I assumed Teklu's father comes for conference as the leader of the house by himself while the mother stays at home. However, later on I've learned from Teklu and also from the father that the mother works during school hours and she can't come to school except Friday, when she says she has a day-off work.

Regarding Teklu's parents, Mrs. Aisha reports the following: "It is always the man", indicating that Teklu's father is the one who makes decisions. Mrs. Aisha initially thought that the father is, rightly, respected as a head of the family, which she says she does not take it as submissive mother. Linking home and classroom in terms of discipline, Mrs. Aisha thinks that the "man's voice" in home sets a good tone for classroom discipline.

Diversity. Mrs. Aisha is aware of her own race and ethnicity as a Black-American person and professional, and she is sensitive to student and staff diversity in her school. She relates to the school diversity and her work as a teacher as follows:

> Although the school is rich in the student population of 42 different languages, I'm the only black teacher in the building, and I feel the pressures of symbolic experience. When I first came, no one thought I was a teacher…you know…everybody thought I was a TA (Teacher Assistant). Sometimes I feel as though my professional skills and views were not taken seriously, especially by some white parents, because I'm black. However, I feel I'm a good model and resource on many issues related to the black in my school. I have had white parents who say school is very tough and also other parents who have had

> relatively smooth experience in a different way. But… you know, I mostly get a big hug of "thank you" at the end of the year.

Mrs. Aisha describes that Mile High elementary school is very rich in diversity of student population with 42 different languages. However, the staff is not as diverse and she is the only Black teacher in the building. Despite her token status, she thinks that she is especially a great resource and help for the black children and their families. With respect to her culturally responsive practice, to the school diversity, Mrs. Aisha claims the following:

> I try to do multicultural things at least in my classroom—we do different clothes, foods, family stories, etc…. On the 19th of December, for example, I do family heritage day and it is opportunity for the children to talk about who they are. Students design their own family crest as meaningful to them, and parents make dishes, which we all share at school. This is a little of my culturally responsive practice. "How to Teach Children Who don't look like you" and "Teaching Other People's Children" are the best books for any person who wants to go in to teaching. We all, black, brown, white, whatever, teach our own and other people's children and it is not just one way anymore.

Mrs. Aisha states that she makes efforts to be responsive to her culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families. She tries to make her classroom children feel welcome and represented by giving them opportunities to dress in their cultures and for their parents to bring cultural dishes, which they share in the school cafeteria. She also does ritual activities as part of her culturally response educational practice on the 19th of December. Mrs. Aisha's culturally responsive practice is compatible with the concept of culture "portrayed as homogenous and frozen in time when teachers engage their students in learning about the holidays, food, typical costumes, and art of their own or other cultures (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005, p.

131).” The authors state that this is how stereotypes of other cultures are created and the special even approach to culture devalues the everyday experiences of many immigrant students in the U.S. schools. Mrs. Aisha also suggests some useful books for any teacher of culturally and linguistically divers classroom as helpful resources.

Observation Data from Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria’s Individualized Education Program Meeting

Teklu, a first grade student, is tested at the request of his classroom teacher, Mrs. Aisha, and on parents’ consent. During the IEP meeting, Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team learned that Teklu has sustained early loss of his grandmother who passed away when he was only one year and six months, while his mother and father toiled on work of 16 hours a day. Mrs. Lemlem, Teklu’s mother, reveals that Teklu used to call his grandmother his “mother” when she was alive. His grandmother cared for him and Teklu had a very close attachment with her. After his grandmother passes away, Teklu, with his twin sister, is taken to Ethiopia and made to stay there at extended family’s home until he reached Kindergarten age according to the U.S. education system. Teklu has had some basic Amharic conversational language, which he still speaks, but he has developed some English competency as he is mainly using English at home with his sister, at church with his age children, and at school. Teklu is currently Limited English Proficient (LEP), and therefore he is in English Language Acquisition (ELA) program. Additionally, he has now IEP program. Teklu has presented some educational and social challenges for the classroom teacher and for the family as well. He is aloof and refuses to engage in conversations in classroom, and his vocabulary, especially long vowels, needs work one-on- one. Towards this end, Teklu is referred to the IEP team for further information and

support with his areas of delay. Teklu's parents are busy working and also they do not have the necessary competency to provide interventions for him at home beyond playing parental role.

Teklu's IEP meeting begins at 9:00 am in his regular Mrs. Aisha's 1st grade classroom at Abyssinia Elementary School. The researcher joins Mrs. Aisha with three of the IEP team, a special education teacher, a counselor, and a speech therapist. An occupational therapist is excused from the meeting by the team members and the parent as I later learn when the meeting starts. It is 9:10am and the special education teacher calls Mrs. Lemlem to check if she is coming. Mrs. Lemlem does not answer. It is 9:15am and Mrs. Aisha calls her to try again using the same phone number. Mrs. Lemlem answers and says that she is coming. Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team begin debriefing Teklu's academic and social skills to each other and updating each other on the information they need for the meeting.

Mrs. Lemlem arrives at 9:24am, 24 minutes late, and apologizes for being late, which she says it is because she thought the meeting is in the afternoon. Laughing at herself and mumbling, she indicates that she misinterpreted 9:00am with 9 o'clock in Ethiopian time in the afternoon, which is 3:00pm according to the U.S. time calendar. She adds that her brain sometimes interprets the time in Ethiopian context and hard to adjust until now, and she says, "Sorry". The researcher explains the eight hours difference and the associated confusion to the team. Mrs. Aisha indicates that she has never thought about time this way, at which point the counselor jumps in and says one thing to learn about the time difference.

It is time to begin the meeting. Mrs. Aisha introduces herself looking at Mrs. Lemlem and saying, "You know me; I'm Mrs. Aisha, Teklu's classroom teacher." Mrs. Lemlem nodes. The special education teacher says her name and her role, followed by the counselor and the speech therapist all taking turns from left to right around a big round table. Mrs. Lemlem says her name and indicates she is Teklu's mother. Mrs. Aisha states to Mrs. Lemlem that they excused the occupational therapist from the meeting, and indicate that she (the occupational therapist) also talked to the mother the other day about her not coming to the meeting. Mrs. Lemlem promptly looks at me and Mrs. Aisha and the team with confusion about Mrs. Aisha's statement excusing the occupational therapist. The mother says, "Yes, no problem. It's ok". The special education teacher immediately says "Perfect, just sign here to indicate that you're excusing the occupational therapist from the meeting and I will share her results with you". The mother takes a defensive posture and says, "What? Why do I sign?" the researcher explains to Mrs. Lemlem in Amharic that she needs to sign to give permission that a meeting can be conducted without the occupational therapist, and that the therapist sent her assessment results of Teklu to the special education teacher to share with her (the mother). All completes the consent form before the meeting, which the mother again reluctantly signs, mumbling in Amharic that, "They ask us to sign everything and sometimes we don't know what we sign, which we may get in trouble for…a lot of paper and signing everywhere you go."

Mrs. Aisha asks, "What's that you don't like in the letter you mentioned to me over the phone?" Mrs. Lemlem responds, "My husband see the letter and say, 'what's

this letter?' Disability? What?' My child's ok, no problem". The special education teacher promptly responds to the mother, "Yes, Teklu's just fine; he hears well; his eyes are normal; he can learn; and we just need to make sure he's at age appropriate growth in terms of his language development, academics and social skills." Mrs. Lemlem takes a defensive posture and responds, "Language? I don't know what happened here. Home, he play. He play with sister. He ask her and talk with her!" Mrs. Aisha interrupts and says:

> Yes, he wants to do all you said here in school and I think he's a little bit shy. Also, I noticed that he struggles with long vowel words like banana, umbrella, etc. For banana, he says 'nana' or 'mana' or something like that. For umbrella, for example, he would say '…brella' 'um…lla'. He leaves off the first part of the word or he drops off the last part, or else he condenses the word leaving out the mid part. Do you understand what I'm saying? And have you noticed this at home?

As Mrs. Lemlem continues to take a defensive posture saying, "Yes, he says 'banana' and he asks food by name whatever he want. But she indicates, "Last time he play with his sister and he say 'princess' to say 'Chrismars'. 'It's Chrismars' His sister say 'he mean Chrismars'. I don't know…it confuse because he speak two languages. I speak him English now. And the sister speaks English to Teklu. We ask school and separate them in different classes so they don't speak each other Amharic. But he only count 1 to 7 and jump to 10". However, Mrs. Lemlem says, "I don't know what happen here," and she struggles to make sense the academic jargons of "long syllable words", "leaves of the first syllable", "drops off the last syllable". She reveals that her husband and she requested the school to separate Teklu and his twin sister so that they do not get chance to speak in Amharic to each other at school. She thinks that Amharic is causing Teklu's English to atrophy, which she is concerned that this situation may negatively impact his learning. Mrs. Aisha and the special education team are very polite, slow to

speak, and very careful with word choices as they were already cautioned about the word 'disability" that triggered anger and resistance from Teklu's parents. Regarding Mrs. Lemlem's choice of English over Amharic, Mrs. Aisha states:

> It's ok. You guys can do whatever you want at home for your child and what you wish your child would like to be. If you want to keep your heritage language and culture, that's perfectly fine and that's what many people would like to do. You don't have to worry about Teklu's confusion with different languages. Actually, research supports that children benefit from growing up bilingual and bicultural. But it's up to you and do what you want to do at home naturally.

The special education teacher promptly and politely asks the mother to share her experience with Teklu at home with respect to his language development, counting numbers, identifying colors and shapes, as well as anything she would like to share so that they will gain inside information from the mother. The teacher also indicate that they need to hear from her and they want to verify their assessment results with the data they gain from her so that they all can make a sound decision for Teklu's learning and development.

Tekilu in the eyes of Mrs. Lemlem. In the meeting, Mrs. Lemlem happily begins sharing her inside story about her son, Teklu, as well as about her family as follow:

> Teklu born here. He like his grama, my mom, best and he call her my mother. Very close with her. She's not here now. She pass away. He sleep with her and nobody sleep with her. He only sleep with her. If his sister go sleeping, he…what's /mäwärwär/? (I say "to throw")…yes, he throw to her anything he get….he angry because he have to sleep first, not anybody. You know, I work 16 hours and no time. She's his mom. He not sleep with me and my husband. When she pass away, I take him to Ethiopia in Addis Ababa to arrange family. I take him and sister.

As Mrs. Lemlem unpacks her sad story of loss and struggle to balance life and work, indicating that she took her two children to Ethiopia when her mother passed away to bridge the child care gap created by a loss of their grandmother (her mother), the team remains silent and attentive while trying to connect to her family's story the mother

narrates. Mrs. Aisha indicates that this is a brand new story she is hearing about her student, Teklu, and she is interested to hear more about him and the connection with his grandmother who passed away. She asks the mother, "Sorry, but when did this happen? How old was Teklu when your mother passed away?" Mrs. Lemlem does not exactly remember the time but she states Teklu was about a year and half when his grandmother passed away and she took him and his sister to Ethiopia so that they would stay with the extended family there until they hit Kindergarten school age here in the U.S., and she brought them back. The counselor asks if she remembers Teklu's language development at that time, especially with relation to his communication with his grandmother. Also, Mrs. Aisha remarks that Teklu might have had traumatic experience of his grandmother's loss that is interfering with his language as well as academic and social language development, which the team unanimously agrees. The mother responds:

> I don't know. I work 16 hours and my husband also works. I have only one day off…Fridays. But I work and come home and sleep and go back work. When I come in the night, they sleep. I don't know. I take to Ethiopia when my mom pass away and they speak Amharic. They stay home with family and speak to hmmm…the big people [adults]…you know. When they come here and go school, my daughter learn English fast, but Teklu is slow….you know he shy. He eat slow…you know…he sit long time when he eating. He confused with Amharic and English. He try speak only English home now. He say kids lough in classroom. I ask him why kids lough? Kids don't lough. But he say, no they laugh. I think he speak no good English and he afraid to speak. And if he see new person, he don't talk quickly. But my daughter quickly greet and talk to a person. If Teklu want play with something, he ask first. He say, 'is this mine?' He want to sure he can play it and if he get permission.

Mrs. Lemlem states that she barely spent time with Teklu during his early age as she was busy working and also as she had the support of her mother. She reveals that Teklu had a very strong tie with his grandmother and even he considered her as his "mother". As a result, Mrs. Lemlem hardly remembers Teklu's early stages of language

development. She also reveals the difference between Teklu and his sister and the former as introvert, shy and aloof in behavior while the latter extrovert and self-starter with respect to communication with adults and children. Mrs. Lemlem also points out that Teklu has elevated anxiety that emanates from his lack of proficiency in his verbal language, for which he thinks his classmates lough at him when he tries to speak. She believes that Teklu is confused between Amharic and English and that his English language atrophied because he used only Amharic in Ethiopia and also more Amharic at home in the family here in the U.S.

It is 10:30am. Indicating that they have enough information from the mother about Teklu's inside information, and in the interest of time, each team member gesture that they need to move forward and in turn share their assessment results. Mrs. Aisha states to Mrs. Lemlem that they have learned some good information from her about Teklu, indicating that the mother also notices some similar difficulties her son has at home, which she nods in agreement. Mrs. Aisha says now it is time for each team member to share their assessment results of Teklu's academic, social, and motor skills, and that the mother will decide if she accepts the additional support he needs at school. As each team member present the assessment results and when the special education teacher mentions the terms "disability" and "delay" in some academic and social skill areas, Mrs. Lemlem again takes a defensive position about accepting extra help for Teklu, mentioning that, "My child has no problem. He is just fine, but he shy". Actually, the special education teacher proposes the term "delay" instead of "disability" as the child had delays in some academic areas, which also relieved the parent.

Mrs. Lemlem begins to tell the researcher in Amharic, “You know, once they put a label to my child, it’s always going to accompany him, which is not good for him,” which the researcher exactly interpreted for the team what Mr. Lemlem said. Mrs. Aisha states that there are ongoing evaluations and monitoring. She also invites Mrs. Lemlem to come to classroom anytime she wants, indicating that he will receive the academic and social support he needs for minimum 30 minutes a week each, which is a total of an hour minimum in the regular classroom, which I interpreted back for Mrs. Lemlem in Amharic. Finally, Mrs. Aisha asks the mother her decision. The mother says, “I’ve to ask my husband. I don’t decide now. I call him now you have phone?” Mrs. Aisha says, “Sure, go ahead and call him.” While Mrs. Lemlem is making a phone call, the special education teacher comments the following:

> The other day father was talking to me because he is upset about the wording on the notice of meeting. The word “disability” is on that paper and the parent greatly disagree with having their son labeled. But we try to explain things. The family can always choose to decline services. It sounds like they want the extra help from our service providers without placing a label.

Mrs. Lemlem briefly converse in Amharic with her husband over the phone and the team chats. She comes back and says, ‘Yes, he says ok,” which comes as a relief. Teklu is referred to the IEP team for further information and support with his areas of delay. Mrs. Lemlem mumbles to the researcher in Amharic that her husband and she are busy working and also that they do not have the necessary content and language competency to provide interventions for Teklu at home.

Reflection on the Observation

With respect to the structure of the situation, the participants were not overtly differentiated from each other as leaders and followers. Mrs. Aisha with the IEP team

brings the professional assessment results to the table while Mrs. Lemlem, Teklu's mother, brings inside knowledge. Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team believe that the inside information Teklu's mother contributed will supplement their raw data of assessment result they just did at school. Actually, despite her English barrier and lack of understanding of the IEP academic jargons, Mrs. Lemlem appears with greater status and takes a protective mode thorough out the meeting. Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team remain respectful and supportive while trying to follow the IEP meeting procedure to ensure they give adequate information to the mother so that she can make a sound decision. The interaction was intense from both sides throughout the conference while the team also remains informative and learner on the side. The interpretation of the meaning and effect of IEP is not easy to conceptualize for Mrs. Lemlem. Regarding the IEP and the term "disability", both sides' values or assumptions are observed to be contested through this event. Lack of English language proficiency to confidentially and competently advocate for Teklu, parent-teacher role expectations, being a black and immigrant, and being invisible in the school due to system and self are some of the reasons Teklu's mother feels vulnerable. Mrs. Aisha understands Teklu's struggle as partly due to the disconnection of the strong bond he had with his grandmother at his early stage of life. The meeting ends with IEP in place for Teklu, and with the plan to confer periodically and/or as needed.

Mrs. Aisha together with the team greeted Mrs. Lemlem when they first met in the conference room. They could, to some extent, communicate in English during the meeting. The conference was about Teklu's IEP initial meeting. On one hand, Mrs. Lemlem took a defensive posture about the IEP education program, which she states it as

a problem, and the related terms like "disability" throughout the meeting until she finally consults with her husband and agrees to accept the IEP for Teklu. On the other hand, Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team politely took an aggressive position of educating Mrs. Lemlem about the IEP and advocating for Teklu indicating that he cannot benefit from the general education classroom alone. Mrs. Aisha together with the IEP team asked Mrs. Lemlem questions about Teklu's actions and behaviors at home and they also answered questions Mrs. Lemlem asked them. There were nonverbal cues, subtle nuances and/or behaviors exhibited from both sides in the meeting which were all symbolic and meaningful in the context. Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team put an IEP plan in place for Teklu indicating that they will have annual review meeting. They also stated that Mrs. Lemlem may contact them with questions and/or ideas if she wants to. The last tone of the conference was encouraging because they all reached on an agreement for Teklu's IEP.

Taxonomic Analysis of Case Two – the IEP

Based on domain analyses terms related to parent perceptions of the IEP, the researcher constructed the following questions related to parent perceptions of the IEP meetings involving Teklu: "How are IEP meetings difficult?" and "What would make the technical terms and Special Education terminologies more understandable?" The questions were asked to further understand the subject in question.

From the data, terms and phrases such as: "resistance from parents," "difficult," "powerful terminologies," "SpEd terminologies," "confusing terminologies," and "unfamiliar concept" describe the IEP meetings. Based on this analysis, the researcher created structural questions to ask Mrs. Aisha and Mr. Bedilu as follows: "How do you

describe the IEP meeting for Teklu?" and "How many different people are involved in Teklu's IEP meeting and what are their roles in his learning and growth plan?"

Mr. Bedilu responded in this way: "We know and understand. You know, we look dummy and without history and/or story. I've lots of life experiences, and I've five other languages and I try English." Mr. Bedilu states that he has learned a lot from real-life experiences and he speaks five languages and some English. He assumes slightly different role from the teacher and the IEP team, indicating that he mostly plays a parental role of making sure both of his children have what they need for life and go to school. He emphasizes that he works hard and lives for his children, but that he lacks the necessary knowledge and language skills besides time to partner with the teacher. Therefore, Mr. Bedilu states that he leaves the education part for the school to the teachers.

After these questions were answered, the researcher modified the taxonomy and developed the final write up in order to increase the reader's understanding of the data.

Case Three: Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma

This section presents the case of Mrs. Almaz, Lucy's mother, and Mrs. Emma, Lucy's 3rd grade teacher. Personal data of Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma (pseudonyms) precede interview and observation data respectively on their perceptions of their relationships and partnership efforts.

Table 5

Profiles of Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma

Data Category	Pseudonym; Age	
	Mrs. Almaz; 35	Mrs. Emma; 50
Educational background	High school graduate	Master of Arts degree
Current occupation and years of experience	In-home caregiver, 7 years	Elementary teacher, 10 years
Previous occupation	Housewife, night-shift student	Squad leader in Air Force
Race/ethnicity	Black-African, Amara	European-American
Languages	Amharic, English	English, German
Years lived in the U.S.	7	48
Child, child's grade level, and school	Lucy, third grade, Union Elementary	Lucy, third grade, Union Elementary

Mrs. Almaz

Mrs. Almaz is only a high school graduate, which she completed through the evening extended program that is also known as nigh school in Ethiopian context. She is Amara by her ethnicity and she speaks Amharic, Tigrigna, and some English in terms of her multilingual fluency. She is a black immigrant lady in terms of race, and social status. Mrs. Almaz brings all these backgrounds to a relationship with Mrs. Emma, who has a different background.

Mrs. Almaz states that she communicates with Mrs. Emma, Lucy's teacher, often and that she has a good relationship with her and actually with some other teachers in the school. She says that her husband is busy working and that she shoulders most of school responsibilities for her two children: Lucy, a 3rd grader and Lidia, a Kindergartener.

Regarding her relationship with Mrs. Emma, Lucy's teacher, and other teachers, Mrs. Almaz says the following:

> Every morning when I take Lucy to school and when I pick her up after school, I get a chance to briefly chat with Mrs. Emma and some other teachers I come across. I like to greet and talk to teachers. I ask her about Lucy and her day, and if there's anything she wants me to know before we go home. You know, Lucy is fairly quiet outside and at school and when she goes home she explodes. That's why I want to get some heads up before we go home. Sometimes if I don't understand homework, I ask her teacher to show me how to do it the next morning. She's very helpful. She tells me I can ask her if I don't understand homework and also she said she can help Lucy to finish her homework before class begins if I drop her earlier. Regarding school, I think last year was better as they had frequent math and literacy nights. They taught us how to do and model math and reading at home. This year, I've not seen a letter coming home about it. The school has family literacy program, which I attended last year and it was very good. I learned many things about education and classroom teaching and learning. This year, I take work assignment everyday between school hours and I can't attend…I feel bad about it.

Mrs. Almaz seems to have a functional relationship with Mrs. Emma to positively impact Lucy's learning, especially with getting help to get homework done. Mrs. Almaz reveals that she converses with teachers as she meets and she is visible in school in the mornings and afternoons when she drops and picks up Lucy respectively. With respect to school relationship, Mrs. Almaz indicates that there was math night and literacy night last year that she attended and benefitted from for Lucy's learning. She says that the school staff talks about math and literacy and parents do some activities at school. She states that the school staff show parents and model them how to do math and literacy, which she indicates this year is different that she has not got a letter about such school events/nights yet. She also reveals that last year was better because there were some family nights that she could attend, but not this year because of, sadly, inconvenience with her changing work schedule. When specifically she talks about Family Literacy Program, Mrs. Almaz points out that:

> I used to go to family literacy in Lucy's school twice a week last year. This year I stopped because my work schedule is changing every day and is not convenient. But the family literacy is useful. We learn English, and the teacher teaches us how to work with our children. Sometimes some guests come and speak to us on different education and safety related topics. I like the PACT [Parent and Child Together Time].

When asked to explain PACT, Mrs. Almaz says that it is the time when she goes to Lucy's classroom to learn with her and do classroom activities together. In the classroom, she reveals that she learns from Mrs. Emma and she tries to do and model the same at home. When asked to give some examples of her take away from the classroom, for example, Mrs. Almaz points out that she learned how Mrs. Emma teaches the word 'home' by its sound and the letters. She says she imitates the teacher at home. Mrs. Almaz even indicates that her husband says, in her words, ''Why don't you be a teacher? …LOL…or you can volunteer at school. You might get a job there...and I say it's enough that I help Lucy."

Lucy in the eyes of Mrs. Almaz. When specifically asked to allude to Lucy's strengths and struggles, Mrs. Almaz promptly started describing Lucy, her child, without hesitation. She appeared to know her very well, and she describes Lucy as follow:

> Lucy loves art. She's really good at drawing pictures and painting. She struggles with math. Lucy also goes to Kumon tutorial center for math. You know, I pay $115 every month and she's improving her math. It's a lot of money, but…you know, I've to do it for my child. There's this state test coming…is it TS [TCAP]? It begins with T…I think it's TSA…it's for third to tenth grade students… and we're also revising at home for the test. For example, we practice problem [word problem] like *if somebody has this much of money and somebody else has that much of money and they both donate this and that much each, how much money they both remain with*…etc….Additionally, I bought her some books for math. I bought a calendar to teach her some additions too. Oh, for her art work, I bought her different painting markers and apron. She's what she needs for her art. Her aunt also encourages her to keep her art up. Her aunt has three children and one is in Lucy's classroom. They get to meet too often and they play together a lot. Even when the school was closed last fall for two weeks, Lucy stayed at her cousin's home for one week.

Mrs. Almaz carefully understands Lucy's ups and downs, and she indicates that she gears support for her targeting her struggles like math. Although she even does not know the technical term of the State TCAP test, she is aware of it and she proactively buys materials for Lucy to review and practice math. She also mentions that art is Lucy's strength, which she buys some materials for her to keep it up and she even mobilizes support from Lucy's aunt and her cousins, Mrs. Almaz's sister and her children. The researcher asked Mrs. Almaz if she has community support that supplement Lucy's learning or anything related to education and she states that:

> We've some programs at church. Friday nights from 6pm to 7:30pm, interested children learn Amharic language according to their age levels. Children learn Amharic with computer just like they learn English…do you know "Tsehai Love Learn" in computer? It's children's learning like A for Apple, B for Banana, etc. in English. Teenagers learn writing sentences, doing some presentations, writing stories, and performing some visual arts and drama in Amharic. The teachers are church board and member volunteers.

"Tsehai Loves Learning" Mrs. Almaz stated is an Amharic Language Educational Children's DVD (Digital Video Disc) with English Subtitles. It is an Educational Preschool Media Initiative for Ethiopia. Despite the external community support and Mrs. Almaz's endeavor to instill the heritage language and culture in Lucy, while also supporting her classroom learning, she indicates that sometimes it is hard to talk secret things with Lucy in the public because she speaks in English to her. Mrs. Almaz hopes that they, as parents, can discipline their children and warn them from troubles in Amharic. She says that they can also use Amharic with grandparents when they go to Ethiopia or when grandparents come here to visit, either way. So she thinks that it is useful for them as parents and for the children too. Mrs. Almaz wants Lucy to be successful in her education and in her life in the future. As you know, she says, if

children do not succeed in their learning, they will struggle with life like their parents later in life. Mrs. Almaz wants Lucy to work a professional job so that she will not do labor work like her. This country, she says, there are opportunities but it is hard to get something if you do not work hard, which she indicates she is doing her best for Lucy to be a good student. Mrs. Almaz, with a support of hard-working husband, emphasizes that she is endeavoring to earn a good life for her family, which she wants to extend especially to her children, Lucy, a 3rd grader and Lidia, a Kindergartener.

Mrs. Emma

The squad leader. "I Like To Instruct Others and Air Force Gave Me the Discipline I Needed." Mrs. Emma is a European-American woman in her late fifties. She is married and has two grown-up sons. Her husband is also a teacher. Mrs. Emma has taught English as Second Language (ESL) at college and she had been the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), which she says it was partly teaching rather than just some form of training, before she became an elementary teacher about 11 years ago. Mrs. Emma started out her elementary teaching career with a degree in elementary education, and has taught Kindergarten and first grade. Mrs. Emma relates her air force duty with her teaching duty in terms of discipline. She recognizes that discipline is one important thing she learned from air force that she brings to education. In Mrs. Emma's words:

> Those of us coming from other business world like air force, military, or coming from an outside to teaching appreciate more about what has to happen and how long the hours are and we don't complain much like other people who just come to teaching because we have been to other places. In schools sometimes teachers who directly come out of college to teaching, they just teach and get summer vacations, etc. They don't really understand what it entails to be in a different/another career like air force where you have to work 360 days a year that is a reality in the air force where you don't get long breaks like when you are a

> teacher. For example, in the air force I was a squad leader of 250 military and I understand and have empathy for the principal and their work as I learned in air force that it is difficult to please everybody.

In the above quote, while criticizing some novice and young teachers she has met expecting to punch time clock between 8 to 4, Mrs. Emma wants to emphasize that elementary teachers cannot be excellent teachers unless they have to work hard and longer hours to get things done and do excellent job, especially when you have immigrant children in their classroom. Mrs. Emma reports that most of the time she works from early morning and to late evening devoting herself giving extra tutoring at school and/or home to recent immigrant children who are also English Language Learners (ELLs) and reaching out to their parents. Mrs. Emma was actually recently recognized in the district as a "Teacher of the Year" for her extra endeavors of teaching, tutoring, and reaching out to student families. Mrs. Emma points out that, "I sometimes feel like I work 80 hours a week and when I calculate my wage, it's probably not something you are looking for if money were the prime motivation". Mrs. Emma enjoys the time she spends with children seeing them learn and grow.

The vulnerable teacher. Although Mrs. Emma says she is used to making home visits, Mrs. Emma indicates that sometimes she feels like she is vulnerable when she gives out her personal phone number to parents and goes to their homes to tutor and/or to meet with parents. But she also states that parents understand when a teacher cares enough about a child and respect the family. She also reveals that the most important part of educating others does not involve telling information, but it is rather more about asking questions, listening and observing. When she goes to Lucy's parents' apartment to tutor her, for example, Mrs. Emma says she learns about their home situation just by chatting with the family, by observing and by listening to them. She pointed out that it

upsets her when some teachers, her colleagues, do not make extra efforts to connect with parents by extending their times and/or mileages to parents' homes. Mrs. Emma says, "You have to be caring enough and a good role model to be an elementary teacher. Actually, you have to be devoted, loving and caring to be an elementary teacher". Mrs. Emma reveals the "many hats" teachers should wear in her work with a child and parents. She strictly comments that teaching is demanding and needs hard work, and it also needs stepping outside a traditional role and devoting time and energy.

Regarding teaching a child and relating to parents, Mrs. Emma reflects on her previous experience of exposing herself to the community to acquire language and culture when she lived in Germany as a Squad Leader in the air force. However, Mrs. Emma reveals that her teacher education program did not prepare her for the classroom reality in terms of effectively functioning in the diversity of immigrants and refugees. She relates her past experience when she talks about teaching a child and relationship with parents that she deliberately endeavors to make home visits and connect with the student family to gain inside stories that she can use in her classroom teaching. Mrs. Emma points out that:

> I am Caucasian, White, European- American specifically form Irish-Scottish background. I think one thing that helped me to relate to diverse immigrants is traveling somewhere I don't know the language and feel what that is like, which teachers may benefit from such experience so that they feel what it looks and feels like to be in a different country. When I was in air force I was stationed in Germany and I didn't know any German language but I learned it quickly. I chose to live on economy, not in base, to learn the language and culture in the community. I deliberately lived in the town to learn the language, culture, and about the country. This experience helped me to understand the loneliness, being afraid to say anything, and the feeling that somebody says something to you and you just saying ah…ah...without understanding it. As a teacher, I understand the situation of immigrant students and their families who are coming from different parts of the world.

Using her own real experience, Mrs. Emma reflects on her own personal and professional lives, and she makes a point that living in another country and/or exposure to a different world will definitely help to gain a different perspective.

With regard to the teacher's perspective on Ethiopian immigrant parents and on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children, Mrs. Emma had a clear vision for herself and other teachers:

> Don't make negative assumptions. Talking to each parent and building relationship and maintaining it is key to foster relationship. I have developed parent questionnaire to learn as much as I can about the child and parents in the beginning when I first meet them. During the first week of school I send a letter home welcoming the child and parents indicating that they can come to my classroom at any time and informing them that I will make home visit sooner or later. I even give them my cell phone number just to facilitate communication. Some teachers want parents to learn English as quickly as possible and I don't think that they can do it themselves if they were asked to pick some Amharic, Oromo, etc. for example, in such a short time as it is difficult. They even ask me how I go out to students' houses and do home visit and communicate with families when I don't know their languages. My response is that parents usually know a lot more English than I know Amharic, etc., and they care more about their children. They also understand the gestures and make sense what I'm talking about.

Mrs. Emma warns that teachers should not make negative assumptions and she advises talking to parents. She reveals that initial parent meeting and greeting is a way to welcome and learn from their inside stories. Mrs. Emma tries to put herself in the parents' position with respect to how difficult is learning a new language. She makes home visits and shares her cell phone number for prompt communication when needed. Mrs. Emma points out that more has to be done for parent outreach as follow:

> I don't believe teachers can do a good job with immigrant families by just punching time clock from 8 to 4...you know…they need to work more than that. I noticed Lucy's reading below grade level and I started tutoring her back in my classroom and making home visit to show her parents how to read to/with him. I even informed them it's ok if they read in their language. There was also behavioral issue I needed to address during the home visit. The personal touch

> and when they see that I have vested in their child I see that they tend to go okay….and I give it a shot and sometimes it works and sometimes it does not. I say that your child doesn't speak English well and on top of that if he misbehaves, she is at risk of not learning at grade level. I warn the parents that the child may not perform at grade level if he does not get the push. I noticed with my students that because I encourage parents most students are able to do it and at school and going their home and work on their letters and sounds, which gets them even a head.

Growing up, Mrs. Emma says that she saw few people different than her until she was 13, and that was up in Texas. She says she was pretty naïve when she came to Dallas and she started to stop and look around at Blacks, Hispanics, etc. for which her dad warned her to not to do. Generally, what motivates Mrs. Emma to teach in her current school is not the payment though she reveals she gets paid more now. She feels that it is her responsibility to get the many immigrant and refugee students in her school the best education. She points out that:

> It is kind of hard to explain…but it is kind of natural for me even though there are some kids who take the heck out of you. I would be more motivated to teach in my school than say for example in XYZ School because, there, students get education they need regardless.

Mrs. Emma thinks she is teaching at a school where she can contribute more and she indicates that she is looking forward to stay in the school. She is a European-American in terms of race and speaks English and some German in terms of multilingual fluency. With respect to education, she has MA (Masters of Art) in elementary education. Mrs. Emma also used to be a Squad Leader in the Air Force and stationed in Germany for two years. She has lived in the U.S. throughout her life except she lived for two years in Germany. She brings these backgrounds to her relationship with Mrs. Almaz. All these different backgrounds shape the relationship between Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma, which impacts Lucy's learning and academic achievement.

Obstacles and openings. Mrs. Emma thinks that her previous air force career and life in general taught her a lot and she has changed through time. She highlights that mutual understanding and positive relationship between herself and the parents of Lucy improved Lucy's learning and behavior and she says that she is even performing at above grade level. She says she is able to communicate effectively with parents of Lucy by showing them that she cares and by reaching out and making home visit. She has the ability to accept others and learns from the by showing that she is interested in their background and their point of view. She indicates that she knows the art of two-way communication and how to build partnerships with parents. She has developed effective communication strategies that helped Lucy above all others. In her classroom and when she makes a home visit, Mrs. Emma indicates that she listens and chooses her words carefully while avoiding education jargons as a strategy that offered an opportunity to build trust and gain a fuller understanding of the parents of Lucy.

One head, many hats. Mrs. Emma stresses the many roles elementary teachers have, especially in culturally and linguistically diverse school like hers. She points out that she "wears many hats" during the day in the roles that ranges from teaching and nurturing a child to mentoring and modeling a parent on a positive behavior and effective instruction. She also revealed that she picks up an advocacy role when a child is behind in his/her learning, and she volunteers her time and energy to tutor at school and/or at a child's home as she did for Lucy.

Encouraging parents and bridging home-school gap. In order to explore how Mrs. Emma organizes her knowledge of fostering relationship with the parents of Lucy and learning from their inside culture, I reviewed my field notes and began asking

different types of structural questions. Regarding encouraging Lucy and supporting the parents, which she calls "giving it a shot," she states that "Yes, giving it a shot is like when you encourage a student that s/he can do it. You know…it is like a coach hollering "Go! Go!" to a player. Mrs. Emma says that parents need to trust and get to know the teacher before anything else, and strong relationship can bridge some of the language barriers and cultural differences. She states that parents mostly understand gestures and it is only about their child that they care about the most.

Learning from parents and from experiences. Mrs. Emma indicates that exposure to different parents and different languages and cultures gave her opportunity to learn, which impacted her perceptions of self and others. She says that she can easily put herself in others' shoes and she understands what it feels, looks, and sounds to be different. She states that living in a different country and in a male-dominated career of air force made her visible and hard worker, and also taught her strong work discipline. She states that welcoming and listening to whatever parents might share is key step in initial meeting with immigrant parents. She says that equally important is sharing school/classroom rules and routines with the parents in the language they understand. She points out that a lot of things in different cultures like 'body language' and verbal expressions are interpreted in different ways. She indicates she is aware of such things and her intents and impacts of her words and body expressions to avoid negative impact on parents through her actions and words and also to not misinterpret parents' messages as well. She says she benefits from a benefit of doubt and she always asks when she is unsure of things.

Advocacy. When talking about teaching and nurturing a child, mentoring and modeling a parent, Mrs. Emma adds advocacy to a teacher's responsibility. She explains that advocating for Lucy when he was reading below grade level, being a role model and having a loving and caring personality are important in building relationship with the parents. She adds that coaching Lucy's academic and behavioral progress were all important for fostering relationship with his parents as they can see that I truly care about Lucy. Additionally, Mrs. Emma indicates that she gave Lucy's parents the tools they needed so that they became partners with her for Lucy's learning.

In sum, Mrs. Emma brings real life experience of living in a different country and exposure to different languages and cultures to her work as a teacher and also to the relationship with parents of Lucy. She says her exposure to different world and work facilitates her understanding of how the parents feel as immigrants coming from Ethiopia. She is very careful in her relationship with the parents about her verbal and non-verbal languages lest she might hurt their feelings or misinterpreted and misunderstood, which she indicates that teachers need to be smart about it. She notices that when talking to the parents, she uses words wisely so that the parents can easily relate to what she says and means. For example, she indicates that she says "This is what other parents do to help their children's learning at home and at school," when she advises Lucy's parents to take active role at home and school for Lucy's learning. Mrs. Emma believes that words and phrases like "you are expected to, you need to, do this/that" may have dictating implication that some parents do not like. However, she says that if parents know what other parents in the U.S. do for their children, they definitely want to do the same in the

interest of their children's learning, and this is how she relates the message to Lucy's parents.

Observation of Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma's Parent-Teacher Conference

Union Elementary School is located in a quiet neighborhood of single houses not very far from the main roads. The school is diverse of European American, Hispanic, African Americans, and contemporary immigrants from Africa. It is Lucy's spring parent-teacher conference with Mrs. Emma. When the researcher arrives, the school is congested with school buses lined up, parents waiting in their cars and standing by the building to pick up their children, and the crowd of students getting out of the building line up with the help of teachers and TAs (Teacher Assistants).

The researcher makes clear his dual roles of liaising and learning in the conference. The researcher already received Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma's consent to observe the meeting while also I support Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma with language interpretation as needed. Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma seem to have a functional relationship and a friendly communication at the initial contact and during the introductions. Lucy asks if she can use a computer in the classroom, which Mrs. Emma gives permission.

Progress report. Mrs. Emma begins the meeting by asking if Mrs. Almaz saw Lucy's report card and if she has any question about her grades before she starts talking about it in details. Mrs. Almaz says she does not have a question now and gestures her to continue. Mrs. Emma has Lucy's report card but Mrs. Almaz left her copy at home, which was already sent home as I learned in their conversations. Mrs. Emma explains the achievement status, rubrics, of four levels that are indicated with numbers one to four

in the heading of the report card. Mrs. Emma begins reporting Lucy's progress of reading standards for literature and information text, writing, communicating, math, science, social studies, physical education, music, visual arts, all with their break downs. After she goes through all these categories and subcategories of Lucy's progress, Mrs. Emma asks Mrs. Almaz if she has a question. Throughout the report, Mrs. Almaz just nods in agreement and of understanding of all the academic terms and phrases with their concepts. She points out that Lucy loves visual arts very much. Regarding math, she states that she tries to help Lucy with math but she mentions that the way math is taught here in the U.S. and the way she learned are different.

Mrs. Emma Modifies the progress report in the way it is easy for parents to understand better. She mumbles that it is new standards based progress report that is new to teachers and parents to really digest. Therefore, she adds first person pronoun "I" before each breakdowns of each category, which she prepares on a separate sheet of paper. For example, for the major category of "Reading Standards for Literature and Information Text", she changes the statement, "Comprehends sufficiently complex literature," which is distant to a more personalized way of "I understand sufficiently complex literature," and she takes time and explains the concept using examples.

Mrs. Almaz asks what "2" really means in Lucy's math progress report. She does not seem to be surprised about the grade but she indicates that she wants to know the meaning attached to the number. Lucy has some "2"s and "3"s in her report card. Mrs. Emma explains what "2" indicates mentioning that it is just a rough status of the student's progress and it may not be the perfect "picture" of the student's progress. She also encourages Mrs. Almaz by saying that Lucy has even improved after this grade

report, and she assures that if they keep practicing at home, she will achieve at grade level. Additionally, Mrs. Emma reads from the rubric that the "student partially meets grade level benchmarks for college and career readiness." Mrs. Almaz seems to be more related to Mrs. Emma's explanation than the statement in the achievement status rubric.

Work and social skills. Mrs. Emma goes over the rubrics of work and social skills in the same way she did for the achievement status rubrics. The rubrics are categorized into three: "CD" (Constantly demonstrates), "NS" (Needs support), and "AC" (Area of concern). The rubrics look technical to Mrs. Almaz and she gives me a gesture of not understanding. I explain each rubric to her and she nods understanding. She is also happy that Lucy's report card states "CD", which indicates she constantly demonstrates the work and social skills in the classroom. Mrs. Almaz says that she is very tidy and disciplined and she does not have any concerns at home either. However, she says, "Her math need work and I will continue taking her to Kumon." Mrs. Emma says, "Excuse me, where's that?" Mrs. Almaz explains, "Kumon is after school tutoring center. I pay $115 a month for math tutoring and I'm seeing improvements since she started this year." Mrs. Emma says, "Ok, that's good. Keep doing whatever best you're doing." Mrs. Almaz smiles and says, "I'll try. It's expensive but I want to try until she gets better with her math." Mrs. Almaz mumbles that she has something to ask Mrs. Emma before we go, which I mentioned to Mrs. Emma as she wraps up the meeting.

Lucy's mother gestures that she wants to take about something to Mrs. Emma before we scatter. She says that she wants to take her child, Lucy, with her to Ethiopia to visit her mother who is sick. She mentions that the plan is to return to the U.S. in two months and Lucy will come back to the class when she returns. Mrs. Emma says:

> It's up to you. I can't decide that for you. But if you decide to take Lucy for more than ten academic days, you should withdraw him from the District and I don't know what is going to be done about the learning he's going to miss. Also, I may not be his teacher when she comes back…you know…she may be assigned in a different class with a different teacher. I don't know… but the decision is up to you.

Mrs. Almaz turns to me and mumbles she hopes that Mrs. Emma can simply excuses Lucy from school. She also asks me if Lucy can be registered when she returns from Ethiopia. Mrs. Almaz is not quite sure what Mrs. Emma means by "withdrawing" from school and that she asks me about it. Mrs. Almaz starts talking and muttering about other options and different alternatives they, as a family, have in terms of shortening the trip and/or changing the travel schedule to align with and take advantage of some of the break times so that Lucy will not miss much of the learning times. Mrs. Almaz clearly wants to problem solve and get a clear answer from Mrs. Emma, which does not happen. Mrs. Emma is in a hurry and she tells Mrs. Almaz to take her time, to think about it and let her know her decision when she is ready. The meeting ends.

Reflection on the Observation

Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma warmly greeted each other when they met in the classroom. They could fairly communicate in a common language, English, and I was just a help on the side interpreting while also observing the meeting. The conference was about Lucy's spring progress report. Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma seemed friendly, happy, and passionate about Lucy's academic, social, and behavioral progress, which they both attribute to each other as a team. Mrs. Emma asked and answered questions while also she encouraged Mrs. Almaz to ask questions and discuss any more ideas she had about Lucy. There were not much nonverbal cues, subtle nuances and/or behaviors exhibited from both sides in the meeting as they both seemed more open and genuine in

their interaction about Lucy. They both put a future goal in place to work on Lucy's math, but they did not have a plan for follow-up communication in face to face, phone, letter, etc. Mrs. Almaz stated she would continue getting Lucy the additional tutoring support for Lucy and Mrs. Emma offered to help as much as she could. The last tone of the conference was encouraging as they both successfully communicated and had a future goal.

Using a domain analysis, "avoiding assumptions, initial parent orientation, learning from parents, communication, school-home letter, home visit, learning a few words, caring, understanding gestures, vigilance, friendly, hard work, various communication avenues, Lucy), were terms used by Mrs. Almaz to describe ways to of foster relationship.

From the data, terms and phrases such as: "learning from parents," "vigilance and understanding," "various means of communication, are some of the ways to foster relationship with Lucy's parents, which positively impacts Lucy's academic achievement. From these substitutions, the researcher created structural questions to ask Mrs. Emma as follows: "What various means of communication do you use with Lucy's parents?" "What things do you learn from Lucy's parents that support your work?" "How do you explain gestures and vigilance as related to your relationship with Lucy's parents?" And, "How does avoiding assumptions help fostering relationship with Lucy's parents?" After these questions were answered, the researcher modified the taxonomy and developed the final write up for a better understanding of the data.

Cross-Cases Analysis of the Three Cases

Cross-case analysis, also called comparative case method or comparative analysis, is a study that may include the examination of one case or a collection of cases in order to learn something about a concept, theory, social process and so on (Schwandt, 2007). This study has three cases, and thus the cross-case analysis includes a collection of the cases to understand the commonalities and the differences among the cases with respect to the select parent-teacher relations and their partnership efforts. Schwandt points out that the rationale for the selection of multiple cases in a single study, and the procedures for analyzing data across the cases are two central issues in cross-case analysis. The rationale for the selection of multiple cases in this case study was, though there was no intention of generalizing across the races, to learn from the perspectives of teachers of different races and Ethiopian parents of select children regarding their relationship and partnership efforts. After in-depth data were collected from each case and analyzed separately, the procedures for analyzing data across the cases involved looking at each case to see their commonalities and differences of their perspectives of the problem of the study. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

Q1 What are the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children?

a. What expectations do parents bring to this relationship from previous school-parent experiences?

b. What are the chief areas of concern expressed by parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed?

c. What has helped parents and teachers to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships and how they negotiate their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds?

Componential analysis, which is "a systematic search for attributes (components of meaning) associated with cultural symbols," (Spradley, 1979, p.174), was undertaken in order to uncover relationships and differences between the subcomponents of domains.

An intrinsic multi-case study design was chosen as appropriate research methodology in order to discover, understand, and gain insight into the perspectives of each case and across the cases on the participants' interactions, actions, and experiences of their relationships and partnerships. An intrinsic multi-case case study is undertaken because one wants better understanding of this particular case (Stake, 1995). Stake highlights that intrinsic case study is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of primary interest. Based on data form the interviews, observations, researcher's field notes, and archived documents, single case and cross-case analyses were made that yielded four themes about the perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-teacher relations and the education of Ethiopian children. This study has shown that:

1. There was similarity across cases regarding lack of teacher preparation in working with diverse students

2. A number of factors contribute to the perceived invisibility of parents in schools, including parents' time constrains, their limited English proficiency and cultural and expectation differences between parents and teachers.

3. Ethiopian immigrant parents are unfamiliar with and resist the IEP (Individualized Educational Program).

4. Some Ethiopian parents have knowledge and cultural capital, from living in different countries and speaking multiple languages.

5. Some parents look down on teachers who have prior non-professional work experience, and they have previous ideas about how teachers should treat their children.

6. Messages parents give children influence child's behavior in the classroom.

7. Cultural liaisons are agents for building capacity of teachers and parents in their effort towards mutual communication and collaboration.

The participants were interviewed about their perspectives of their relationships and partnerships, expectations they bring to their relationships, variables that shape their relationships, their chief areas of concerns and how they manage their differences for mutual support in the best interest of student learning. The participants were then observed in in the parent-teacher conferences in classrooms, which helped the researcher gain insights of the participants' actions and interactions that helped corroborate the data gained from interviews. The findings illuminated the opportunities and obstacles the parents and teachers experienced in their relationship and partnership efforts.

Theme one. The first theme, there was similarity across teachers of lack of teacher preparation in working with diverse students, highlights a disconnect between the teacher preparation coursework and actual teaching, and that teachers did not get formal education about issues of immigrants and how to build relationship with them. The present study confirms other research findings that shows that most teachers nationwide are not prepared to meet the complex needs of immigrant and refugee children in their classrooms, schools, and communities, and teachers as well as administrators face challenges of effectively working with refugee and immigrant population (Epstein, 2001; Gándara & Contreras, 2010; Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2009). However, central to the formation and success of parent-teacher partnerships and positive experiences in schools

is providing teachers with adequate training for collaboration (Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb-Johnson, 2007; Murray et al., 2008). Ghong, et al. for example, report that there is a need to educate teachers to work with new African immigrants in the U.S. due to language and cultural as well as parent-teacher roles differences among all others. The present study shows that it was an individual teacher's responsibility to make the extra effort to reach out to the invisible parents.

The three teachers have different approaches to collaboration – or reaching out – to families. Mrs. Maria and Mrs. Aisha report that they only rely on students and home-school communication logbook as approaches to collaboration – or reaching out – to families. They state that they have never done home visits and do not have strong connection with students' families. They initiate parent contact when there is a conference and/or when there is academic or behavioral problems. Mrs. Emma, in contrast, is anxious to build relationship with parents, and she makes extra effort to reach out to families by making home visits and giving her cell phone number to parents for quick communication if need be. Nevertheless, all the three teachers express that their classroom doors are open, and they have high expectations for all students and their parents.

Theme two. The second theme that emerged is that of language barriers, cultural shock, and parents' invisibility in the school system. Although Ethiopia is a multilingual and multiethnic country, it is an intact society that comes from a culture of interdependence and collaboration (Getahun, 2005). Local Ethiopian churches in this state are significant spaces in the lives of the Ethiopian immigrants in that they create and build upon their heritage cultures and languages as well as serving as a source for

networking and collaborating in finding jobs and providing important information exchanges. The significance of the close sense of community that organizations like churches provide among Ethiopian immigrants supports their children in school by cultivating moral and character development that is grounded in faith, respect, obedience, and hope that they can extend to schoolings. The local churches provide a sense of community that helps Ethiopian immigrants socialize and diffuse their stress while supporting one another across a wide range of areas, including education, health, immigration, law, and business.

With respect to invisibility, the parents choose to not attend school events and/or parent-teacher conferences because they feel they are not competent meeting with teachers and that meeting will be unproductive because of their limited English proficiency. Studies show that immigrant parents in general and new African immigrants in particular (Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005; Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb-Johnson, 2007) suffer from "invisibility," and that there is a need to educate teachers to work with this group. The authors define "visibility" in terms of parents' presence and voice in a formal school space or an informal space created by the parents themselves. Ghong and colleagues point out that "Most African immigrants are greeted with phrases, such as, "You have an accent;" "Where do you come from?" "Others would openly tell the immigrants that they do not understand when they talk because of a 'strong accent' (p. 7). All these subtle comments give the immigrant parents negative experiences that contribute to less self-efficacy and low self-image, in addition to their perceived invisibility. African immigrants come from diverse languages and cultures, but they face problems of limited English proficiency and cultural differences in the mainstream U.S.

society, which contributes to their isolation and invisibility. However, in order to increase their knowledge of the school cultural world and their ability to have a significant influence on it, Carreón and colleagues (2005) argue that immigrant parent engagement needs to be understood by paying attention parents' visibility in formal school space or in a more informal spaces created by parents themselves in order to construct meaningful relationships with other school personnel.

Cultural differences involve personal, social, and school cultures and the traditions of parents and their expectations, which are different from those of teachers. Added to these is limited English proficiency that increases the anxiety level of parents about going to schools and communicating with teachers about matters of their children's education and achievement. Culture night presented by parents and community partners, making parents part of planning and spreading the information to other parents as well as personal phone calls and home visits are useful ways to involve all ethnic/racial/SES groups collaboratively. Offering meals and babysitting/personal outreach can improve parent turn out at school events. To engage diverse communities in providing feedback and/or initiating two way communication with the school, it is helpful to hire a bi-lingual "parent to school" liaison who can facilitate communication and understanding between families, school, and community. Moreover, holding meetings to obtain feedback in off-schools forum (i.e., church, community center, etc.) can be an innovative way of reaching out to and engaging diverse communities in their children's education.

Themes three and seven. The theme of parents' lack of knowledge of and resistance to the IEP (Individualized Educational Program), and cultural liaisons are instrumental in building capacity and relationships were noted to be complementary.

Regarding the IEP and the concept of special education in general, this study confirmed other research that show that new African immigrants are not familiar with the concept of special education, IEP, etc. (Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb-Johnson, 2007). Ghong and colleagues report that the contemporary African immigrants in the U.S. despise the idea of a special education, which is a new phenomenon. Immigrants think what special education means for their children. The authors indicate that the immigrants think that special education means a special (in the true sense of the word) school, because in their culture there is only one school that is inclusive for all children. The researcher knows of an immigrant mother from Ethiopia (who did not participate in the present study) in the U.S., who had a similar experience with special education as the parents discussed in the above mentioned study. In the IEP meeting with a school staff, the researcher witnessed the mother happily discussing special education goal for her child thinking that her child was "special" with a meaning "superior," "extraordinary," etc. Only with the help of the researcher, who served as a cultural liaison, could the mother understand that her child actually had a learning disability in some academic areas and the school staff was trying to put an IEP goal together for her child, which she learned to her great disappointment.

Cultural liaisons facilitate communication and understanding between families, school, and community. Therefore, liaisons have pivotal roles in building positive and functional relationships and capacity of parents and teachers by bridging the knowledge and language gaps and by mediating cultural differences. Additionally, there is a need for educating school, family, and community about children with disabilities/special needs. Useful ways to facilitate partnerships include providing more training for teachers, schools, information in monthly newsletter to parents as well as IEP information to all

players in the child's education. Also, such efforts can help to build trusting relationships and positive communication with parents, promoting student success between families and school, especially with concerns related to IEPs.

Furthermore, valuing what parents think and have to say and simply listening when needed was helpful in the IEP meeting with Mrs. Lemlem.

Themes four, five, and six. Ethiopian refugee parents who have knowledge and cultural capital from living in different countries and speaking multiple languages, which puts into question the notion that all immigrant families are disadvantaged. Additionally, some parents look down on teachers who have prior non-professional work experience in entry-level service jobs like working as a cashier in a convenient store. While the social mobility of moving from a cashier work to teaching job is appreciated in the U.S. as showing the person's persistence and dedication to self-improvement,, it was not viewed as such by an Ethiopian parent. Furthermore, Ethiopian parents have previous ideas about how teachers should treat their children, and the messages parents give their children influence child's behavior in the classroom. Therefore, while much of the research focuses on how teachers shape parent-teacher communication, parents also contribute to the dynamics that develop between teachers and parents, which in turn affects the schooling of their children.

Ethiopian immigrant parents often face unique barriers to active engagement in their children's academic lives in the school community. There are individual barriers such as a lack of English language proficiency, and logistical barriers such as work responsibilities and lack of childcare, which often make it difficult for parents to attend school functions (Vera et al., 2012). Systematic planning and organizational change is

needed to improve home-school collaboration with families who historically have been disenfranchised from educational system, which is the case with many contemporary immigrant families (Episten, 2005; Raffaele & Knoff 1999). For collaboration to really work, school organizational structure and leadership has to change, while addressing cultural and social understandings, empowerment, and the possibilities for collaboration. While teachers do what is in their power, principals and school administrators are in the position to bring these issues to the forefront in their school districts. Chavkin (2000) suggests that districts should employ and train a family/community liaison, develop public relations campaigns, and mobilize family volunteers in the endeavor to strengthen parent-teacher and home-school relationship and collaboration, which principals can address as they as they work closely with the school district.

Parents want their children to do well in school and have a desire to help their children succeed, and the majority of them understand clearly that their school engagement helps their child's educational development (Mapp, 2003). When school personnel initiate and engage in practices that welcome parents to the school, honor their contributions, and connect them to the school community through an emphasis on the children, these practices then cultivate and sustain respectful, caring, and meaningful relationships between parents and school staff. When parents have caring and trusting relationships with school staff, these relationships enhance their desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children's educational development. Having parents reach out and invite other parents to school events, offering interpreters and activities for children can be helpful in accommodating parents' ability to attend school events. Differentiating parent involvement so parents may choose activities that are

valuable to them is a more flexible and welcoming way to encourage parents to attend school events and/or activities. Surveying parents on what they are willing to support or are willing to do, developing families' ability to strengthen learning at home by making it something parents can do, such as reading out loud for 30 minutes can help in bridging a child's home-school experiences. Continued and consistent monthly and weekly newsletters, websites, and professional development for parents can improve the partnerships as well.

Summary

The participants' responses in the three cases yielded crossing data across the three cases. These were data regarding the perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. The themes emerged as a result of the cross-case analysis include great variations in teachers' actions and interactions with parents, and lack of teacher training related to working with immigrant families; limited English proficiency, cultural and expectation differences, and time constraint contributed to invisibility of parents in schools; parents are unfamiliar with and oppose IEP (Individualized Educational Program); and cultural liaisons are agents of building capacity and relationships.

The context in which this study took place, including the district, the school, and the participants who were the center of the study and their detailed information as well as the findings that emerged throughout the study, was described in this chapter. The seven following themes resulting from my analyses were discussed:

1. There was similarity across cases regarding lack of teacher preparation in working with diverse students.

2. Barriers to communication between parents and teachers include language and cultural differences and parents' invisibility in schools.

3. Parents are unfamiliar with the Special Education IEP (Individualized Education Program) and resist it.

4. As a result of living in different countries and speaking multiple languages, some Ethiopian parents have knowledge and forms of cultural capital that could be leveraged in schools-community partnerships.

5. Ethiopian parents can bring social views shaped by stratified class relations in their home country, to their assessments of educators in the United States.

6. Parent views of teacher behaviors can influence Ethiopian student attitudes toward teachers as well as their behavior in the classroom.

7. The district cultural liaisons are instrumental in facilitating communication and collaboration between parents and teachers.

Each of these themes was related to the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. Chapter V will provide an in-depth evaluation of the findings as they relate to literature and provide suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study set out to explore the perspectives of Ethiopian immigrant parents and elementary teachers on their experiences regarding their relationships in the education of select Ethiopian children. This chapter will briefly summarize the purpose of the study, the research questions, the sample selection, and the methodology. Additionally, the conclusions of the study and their relationship to the literature will be unveiled. Finally, recommendations and implications for the field as well as the future research in this area will be offered.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the current study was to gain insight into the perspectives of Ethiopian immigrant parents and elementary teachers on their experiences regarding their relationships in the education of select Ethiopian children. Because parent and teacher relationships and partnerships as well as their perspectives toward these are crucial in student learning and growth (Epstein, 2009 & Sheldon, 2008), perspectives of parents and teachers paired on select Ethiopian children were studied. Data on the subject in case were collected from the perspectives of the participant parents and teachers. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

Q1 What are the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children?

a. What expectations do parents bring to this relationship from previous school-parent experiences?

b. What are the chief areas of concern expressed by parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed?

c. What has helped parents and teachers to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships and how they negotiate their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds?

Sample Selection and Methodology

Data gathered and presented in this intrinsic multi-case study (explained in the introductory paragraph of chapter three of this study) were perspectives of Ethiopian immigrant parents and their children's elementary teachers about their relationships and partnerships, which was the purpose of the study. Participants were selected for potential participation in this multi-case intrinsic study based upon their status as recent immigrant parents or as elementary teachers who currently teach the parents' children so that they are potential informants to the field. The participants selected for this study were asked to volunteer their participation and agree to the interviews and observations.

Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) informed the epistemological theory guiding my inquiry. This theory posits that humans respond to things on the basis of the meanings that those things have for them, and that all things with meaning are symbols. Meaning is derived from social interaction mediated by artifacts and culture, the latter being the shared system of meanings learned, maintained, and transformed in interaction with people. Grounded in this theory, I set out to explore perspectives of the participants

on the subject of parent-teacher relations involving Ethiopian families. Interviews and observations of parent-teacher conferences were my primary data sources.

The researcher was a participant-observer in this study, and he became a learner. The research participants became my teachers (Spradley, 1980). Towards this end, the researcher deliberately positioned himself to be an active learner of the symbols in the interviews and observations. Observations were useful for studying parents and teachers' verbal and nonverbal communication during conferences in order to understand their partnership efforts. The data collection and analysis for the present study was done during fall and summer of 2014 with a sample of teachers and parents selected and paired with a child, and the participants were not necessarily those the researcher had worked with prior to the origination of this study. Yet, the researcher was aware of his primary role as a researcher and remained detached enough to collect and analyze data relevant to the problem under investigation.

Findings

The participating teachers and parents were interviewed and observed about their perspectives of their relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. In the interviews, they were asked the expectations they bring to this relationship, the chief areas of concern and how have they been addressed, and what has helped them to effectively establish and maintain their interactions and relationships as well as how they negotiated their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds.

From those interviews and observations, descriptive data were gathered and presented on the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian

immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. The following four themes emerged as a result of the study:

1. There was similarity across cases regarding lack of teacher preparation in working with diverse students.
2. Barriers to communication between parents and teachers include language and cultural differences and parents' invisibility in schools.
3. Parents are unfamiliar with the Special Education IEP (Individualized Education Program) and resist it.
4. As a result of living in different countries and speaking multiple languages, some Ethiopian parents have knowledge and forms of cultural capital that could be leveraged in schools-community partnerships.
5. Ethiopian parents can bring social views shaped by stratified class relations in their home country, to their assessments of educators in the United States.
6. Parent views of teacher behaviors can influence Ethiopian student attitudes toward teachers as well as their behavior in the classroom.
7. The district cultural liaisons are instrumental in facilitating communication and collaboration between parents and teachers.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study has successfully contributed to the growing body of literature in the field, there are a number of limitations need to be considered. Though the researcher used purposeful sampling in selecting ethnically diverse teachers, this did not yield sufficient data to make this a relevant variable even though this was in the original design. As an insider as an immigrant who was a cultural liaison, the researcher did struggle with "making strange" what je was observing and learning, and communicating to readers who are not insiders what he knows.

Overview of Conclusions

As a result of this study, some conclusions can be drawn about the perspectives of a diverse selection of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. First, teachers need formal training in their teacher education program and on job professional development on the issues of relationship and partnership with immigrant parents. The second conclusion relates to the importance of teachers devoting time to parent outreach. Without teachers' extra effort and creativity in their endeavor to engage parents in their children's learning, teachers' such efforts will be futile. The third conclusion is that cultural liaisons are instrumental in parent-teacher relationship and partnership efforts. Therefore, hiring quality cultural liaisons that mirror the school community is integral in creating a student and parent-focused community. Finally, creating a welcoming culture of collaboration is the key to promoting positive parent-teacher relationship and partnership for the success of students.

Discussion

One of the complexities of doing this work on teacher and parent perspectives on their relations in relation to a student/child is that teachers as a group have different perspectives from those of parents, regardless of their cultural background. It would appear that the school culture is more dominate than the personal culture or race of the teacher. Establishing and maintaining relationships with parents is integral to effective teaching. This is because parents' roles in the development of their children and in their support of schools are well established (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Larocque,

Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Sheldon, 2008; Warren, 2005). For example, Larocque et al (2011) state that the value of parental participation is widely accepted, but a great challenge facing educators is promoting and maintaining relationships with ever changing parents to meet the needs of ever changing classrooms. The complexity of the relationships between parents and teachers is fueled by not only their perceived incongruent expectations, but also it is jeopardized by the language and culture differences and the resultant lack of clear communication and effective collaboration.

The present study confirms previous studies that relate specifically to Ethiopian parents and to immigrant parents in general. This study contributes additional evidence that suggests that building sustaining relationships with immigrant parents from Ethiopia (Bar-Yosef, 2001; Bitew & Ferguson, 2010; Getahun, 2005; Hersi, 2012), from Africa (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011), and with immigrant parents in general (Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005; Vesely, 2011), is critical because they face many challenges as they work to engage in their children's learning. The present study, however, makes several noteworthy contributions to the body of evidence in the field in terms of practice, policy, and future research. Research questions for this study included the following.

Research Question One

Q1 What Are the Perspectives of a Diverse Selection of Elementary Teachers and Ethiopian Immigrant Parents on Parent-School Relations and the Education of Their Ethiopian Children?

This study has shown that there are great variations among teachers with respect to parent outreach and collaboration. Teacher participants in this study revealed different conceptions of childhood and child development from those of the Ethiopian families.

Despite teachers' perceived roles of building relationships with immigrant families, the results of this study confirm related studies that reveal many teachers are not prepared to work in diverse schools of immigrant families (Epstein, 2005; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Murray, Curran, & Zellers, 2008). Ladson-Billings (1999) states that prospective teachers must be prepared to teach in diverse schools and communities through training and accreditation process.

Perceptions of parent teacher relations: Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria. Mrs. Kitile struggled with Mrs. Maria in terms of communication and collaboration for Obsa, which was revealed in the data generated from the interviews and observation. Mrs. Kitile reacted to a problem that arose with Mrs. Maria and Obsa: she had not had any contact with the teacher prior to this incident. Mrs. Kitile's reaction to this the minor incident may have seemed overblown, but in fact reflected deeper tensions and concerns on her part that were explored in the interview, such as the teacher's background as a cashier in 7-eleven convenient store and the teacher's perceived carelessness that made Mrs. Ktile perceive Mrs. Maria as not a good teacher for her child.

However, Mrs. Maria states that she had never met with Mrs. Kitile until Obsa complained. Regarding communication and explaining Obsa's English language development to Mrs. Kitile, Mrs. Maria states that Mrs. Kitile wants Obsa to know everything right away:

> Language is a huge challenge and it takes English Language Learners (ELLs) from five to seven years to be fluent in academic English. Academic language takes time developing, and we need social language to develop first. At one point I told Mrs. Kitile that Obsa is just starting to read and he is not where he should be right now. It seems it takes a long time for academic and social language to develop and I think it is hard that parents struggle to understand the reading level of their child and the progress. But…you know…I keep telling them Obsa is in progress in his reading and we are working on it.

With respect to Obsa's frustration with her, Mrs. Maria states that she does not know what really caused the frustration. However, she thinks that keeping the conversation with Obsa and his parents open is helpful in the long run in order to restore positive relationship with them. She says that, "As of now, it's what it's and we need to move forward. I simply switched Obsa's seat to the front for his convenience, which created an issue. But you know, he could have just told me at the time and he wouldn't have stressed all these times. And his mother took a defensive position." Additionally, Mrs. Maria feels like Obsa did not understand the purpose of the incentives Mrs. Kitile gave him by taking him home from classroom when he cried.

Mrs. Maria admits that there is a lack of clear communication between Mrs. Kitile and Obsa, especially with regard to Obsa's understanding of the purpose of the incentives Mrs. Kitile gave gives him. Mrs. Maria seems to have more challenges than opportunities in working with Obsa's parents. She suggests using different communication avenues for parent outreach, knowing and being able to locate school and District resources, being available and not judging, and making home-visits in order to build strong relationship with the parents.

Mrs. Kitile says that her husband and she rarely attend regular parent-teacher conferences and other school programs and activities they are invited to as they kept busy with work. She states that "It is the system. We are struggling to pay bills and we must work hard. When can we go to school? What can we help anyways?" She points out that she lives in different worlds of Ethiopian background and her current life in the United States, and both her husband and she struggle with work and life besides language barrier and lack of adequate and accurate information to fully partner with the teacher. Mrs.

Kitile believes that a teacher possesses great power to make or break a child's life. She states that she wants Obsa to be a Medical Doctor (a Physician) and that Mrs. Maria needs to be an instrument of inspiration for her child because she lays a foundation for his learning and his future success. She also believes that the teacher needs to detect and deter things that provoke parental concerns.

Perceptions of parent teacher relations: Mr. Bedilu, Mrs. Lemlem, and Mrs. Aisha. The perspectives and expectations of Mrs. Lemlem and Mr. Bedilu were slightly mismatched with their relations with Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team with respect to partnering with educators and parenting. Mrs. Lemlem and Mr. Bedilu generally assume and take full responsibility of making sure their child goes to school well nurtured. Although the parents believe they have responsibility of helping Teklu at home with his homework as much as they can, they do not assume reciprocal relationships in terms of Teklu's learning as they expressed in the interview. Additionally, Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team express concern with the lack of English language proficiency for effective communication to occur with Mrs. Lemlem and Mr. Bedilu, which negatively impacts collaboration for Teklu.

To the question, "What are chief areas of concern and how have they been addressed?" Mrs. Aisha responds that:

> I notice that Teklu's parents struggle with English. It really puts the teacher in an intricate situation when parents push back the support they need for their children's education, when they decline translation service. Teklu's father declined translation and we hardly communicated. The mother also mentioned that she does not need a translator, but from talking with her on the phone, we realized we definitely need a translator for the IEP meeting. She also tried to push back the IEP for Teklu, but thank you for helping with the communication, I'm glad that she accepted the plan as he needs it. Additionally, I think there is this belief that it is my job to educate Teklu and it isn't the parents' job to help with his learning. I met the father this last fall conference since the beginning of the

> school and the mother last time for IEP meeting. In the meeting, I gained some useful information about their family story that he had a bond with his grandmother who passed away when he was only a year and half. I think that's traumatic for Teklu, especially at his early stage of learning and development.

Mrs. Aisha explains that she struggles with providing a translation service for the parents to ensure effective communication for Teklu's learning. She says that striking the balance between parent need and child need is not easy, which puts a teacher in a difficult situation. Mrs. Aisha states that she learned inside information from Teklu's IEP meeting, which she says it is useful to support Teklu's learning. Mrs. Aisha believes that Teklu's parents think that it is her sole responsibility to teach the child, and that they do not expect to help. Mrs. Aisha notes that she needs an interpreter to facilitate their conversations. Regarding the last fall conference with Teklu's father and home-school communication, Mrs. Aisha reminisces the following:

> We had a lot of smiles and mimes but no real communication in terms of with words. At times, I pointed or wrote something down or drew a picture, etc. to figure out and communicate. I know he definitely wants the best for Teklu but it's hard to really connect with him because of the language barrier. But I will never assume and I always ask if they need an interpreter. There is a Teacher Assistant (TA) only for Spanish language at school. I use home-school communication log that I send home through Teklu. I also use various picture books and visual cues to communicate with the parent. For example, I draw a telephone picture next to Teklu's name and send home so that they know they need to call me. Never had to make a home visit. I will accommodate time for whatever the parent needs. Tell me you want to meet with me early morning at 8am or late after work at 4pm, I always do my best to be available and this is what I do.

Mrs. Aisha reveals that English language, resistance to getting support, and expectation are major hurdles in the way of her partnership with Teklu's parents. She indicates that she offers a translation service in conferences, which the parents push back, and she tries to mediate using visual cues and gestures for home outreach. But Mrs. Aisha states that she has never done a home visit to Teklu's parents. Mrs. Aisha says the

Teacher Assistant (TA) is Hispanic and she cannot help her with home-school link with Teklu's parents.

Regarding relationships and partnerships, Mrs. Aisha states that some children behave and act in the same way they do in their background cultures as well as in their churches. Mrs. Aisha's perspective on building relationship with parents is that her classroom is open and she has high expectation for all her children and their families. She says that she is flexible with parents' availabilities and she states she accommodates parents' needs so that they can come and talk to her at school in her classroom. However, she indicates that she has not done home visits. Mrs. Aisha indicates that English language, resistance to get support, and parents' expectations about child's education are barriers that get in the way of home and school communication and partnership. Mrs. Maria states that she uses strategies like picture cues, miming, smiling, pointing, and interpreter and translator as needed. Mrs. Aisha believes that parents provide moral support by their presence on their child's conferences besides their support at home.

Perceptions of parent teacher relations: Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma.

Overall, Mrs. Emma and Mrs. Almaz appear to have positive and working relationship. Even though language barrier gets in the way of communication with Mrs. Emma, Mrs. Almaz indicates that she can easily connect with and understand from Mrs. Emma's non-verbal cues she has acquired in their interactions. Mrs. Emma says she uses "body languages" and pictures to supplement her communication with Mrs. Almaz. Mrs. Almaz appears to be a subordinate to Mrs. Emma when it comes to relationship as she takes a position of information seeking as she tries to learn from the teacher to better

support her child: Mrs. Almaz drops Lucy to school in the mornings and she picks her from school in the afternoons, which she sees as an opportunity for to address issues related to Lucy's learning and/or behavior in a timely fashion. Mrs. Almaz says she does not assume a reciprocal relationship with Mrs. Emma as she depends on the teacher for information because of her limited English language proficiency, and lack of necessary knowledge she needs to be an effective partner in her child's learning.

Regarding her concerns about her work with parents and strategies she uses to address difficulties and negotiate multiple perspectives, Mrs. Emma responded as follow:

> Getting Lucy's parents during conferences, especially the father, to school is hard. I also taught her brother at Kindergarten and had the same problem. I think they are busy with work. The other thing is language difficulty in communicating about Lucy's education progress. Additionally, I noticed that sometimes Hispanics are negative about African-Americans and African-Americans are negative about Mongolians or African immigrants that I have to come to learn through contacts with diverse parents. Yet, we do not do a good job of representing different cultures in our school. Kindergarteners study Africa, 2nd graders study China and Japan, 3nd graders study South and North America and the rest is mostly about European Americans. In February we do Black-Americans and Black history month and I don't think that is appropriate since we are just doing it for the sake of doing it. Part of our problem now is that we are so limited with what we put on walls because of the fire codes and our building is old. But posters, alphabets in different languages, etc. are important to make others feel more welcome, especially when 90% of the teachers are European-Americans and there are many students from immigrant backgrounds of non-European-Americans.

Mrs. Emma states that Lucy's parents barely come to conferences, which she thinks because of their busy work schedule and other inconveniences like language barrier. She noticed the interracial frictions among various racial and ethnic groups in her school. She believes that it does not matter what color students are and what language they speak. In her class, she says that though students do not always get along, she teaches and model them to be open and accept each other, to ask questions and avoid

assumptions about others by picture cues and through other visuals that "We all are a family," and "You know…I build a family spirit". To make immigrant and refugee parents feel welcome and to break the communication barrier, Mrs. Emma gives her cell phone number to parents so that they can call her if need be, which she knows some people do not agree with. She explains that this is not for anything but for quicker message and communication with her for things like if a student is sick, or about homework, etc. instead of calling the school and the school calls her. Mrs. Emma claims this will reduce bureaucratic hierarchy of communication, but she is kind of concerned that she may run into a problem.

With respect to what helped her to effectively establish and maintain her interactions with Lucy's parents, Mrs. Emma responded:

> You as a different person need to be so understanding and be a smart about unspoken things. I was just one of a few women in the air force and I stood out and felt vulnerable and I was out of my place and think they are catching me on mistakes, which was partly me and partly the reality. But I really learned to discipline myself. I think it probably helps when you speak English and you are well educated, but it is different for Americans who do not have diploma and never lived in different country. Americans are racist but everybody pretends different but not really. I am coming from air force and understand the dedication and hard work of the parents. The fact that I go to their apartment and tutor Lucy improved her learning at grade level. This poor mom…ah…I explained to her what the reading level means and why I tutored Lucy and now we are very close with the family and they are more accepting of me.

Mrs. Emma stresses the importance of caution with verbal and nonverbal communication with parents, and to understand how it feels to be different. Mrs. Emma bridges the home and school worlds by making home visits and by tutoring Lucy at school and at Lucy's home, which she says she earned more acceptance from the parents. She also indicates the struggle of the parents with modeling Lucy with reading and that

she needs support. She continues discuss positive change that comes with experience and critiques negative colleagues as follows:

> When you get through life, you will change and with experience things will improve. You don't punch time to be a good teacher as there are other things you need to do more out of a regular school time to ensure a child's learning and achievement. One thing that annoys me is that one teacher in my school says she doesn't work for free. And I say to her if you don't like this job, find another one since working for free is inevitable as an elementary teacher. She is in her first year though. If you have real negative colleague somehow they will bring you down…and it is not you teaching them but it is about them learning it. Some teachers say that they are teaching students and giving them the information they need, but teachers must know that they are charged with making sure that students are learning as well.

Although Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma seemed to have friendly and functional relationships in terms of their routine communication and partnerships for Lucy, Mrs. Emma leaves matters that need decisions up to Mrs. Almaz. For example, Mrs. Almaz Mrs. Emma left a decision up to Mrs. Almaz when she asked her to take Lucy to Ethiopia for two months so that Lucy would visit her sick grandma. Mrs. Almaz comes from an unequal parent-teacher relationship background that assumes a teacher as "a sage on the stage" who tells parents what to do. As a result, Mrs. Almaz asks Mrs. Emma to excuse Lucy from school for two months. When Mrs. Emma indicated that the parent has to decide, which the parent did not like as she hope the teacher would tell her what is better so that she makes an informed decision. The researcher's observation with respect to authority is that Mrs. Almaz is just a parent and she assumes that Mrs. Emma will make decisions for her with matters of Lucy when related to school.

In this study a selection of Ethiopian immigrant parents and elementary teachers voiced their perceptions on their experiences regarding their relationships in the

education of select Ethiopian children. The participating parents expressed varied perspectives on their relationships and partnership efforts with their children's teachers.

Parents have significant role in their children's educational development (Cullingford & Morrison, 1999; Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb-Johnson, 2007; Zaoura & Aubrey, 2010; 2011). Ghong, et al, for example, state that parents are the child's first teacher and learning from them can enhance the child's learning environment. Therefore, a strong parent-teacher relationship is important for bridging and maintaining better home-school partnerships in the best interest of a child's learning and achievement (Epstein, 2009; Sheldon, 2008; Shields, 1994). Additionally, parents can provide accurate information about the culture as well as information relevant to their child's learning style.

The parent participants expressed their aspirations to become active partners in the education of their children and to have a strong relationship with teachers/professionals in order to integrate into the web of community buoyed by a common purpose, the education of their children. Ethiopian immigrant parents' engagement in their children's learning and their relationships with their children's teachers and school at large is grounded in their cultural and historical contexts are the knowledge and skills that are required for meaningful partnerships with U.S. schools. Ethiopian immigrant parents do not have cultural capital in the U.S.–the knowledge or resources unique to a dominant mainstream group that give social advantage to members of that group (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). They also do not have social capital in the U.S. (Coleman, 1988)–the social relationships, norms and social control, and information channels that can be accessed to promote their children's school achievement. Furthermore, the great contrasts between

Ethiopian and U.S. schools systems is a source of misunderstanding that leads to lack of engagement: course content and structure, teaching methods, partnership demands, physical structure of schools, and the general school culture (Alemu & Tekleselassie, 2011; Getahun, 2005; Weldeyesus, 2007), taken together make school engagement for these parents extremely challenging.

All the parents in this study had a similar reason for coming to the U.S., including economic advantage and freedom from fear of death as it is the case for Mr. Bedilu. Although they have similar motivations, the parents' trajectories to the U.S. were different—refugee, marriage, and Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery. This has been shown by other studies (Elos Hailu, Mendoza, Lahman, & Richard, 2012; Getahun, 2005). Research (Getahun, 2005) has also shown that Ethiopian parents bring hierarchical relationship to their relationships, in which they perceive themselves and their children as subordinates, with their children's teachers, as well as perceiving teachers as "figures of knowledge," all of which impacts relations with teachers in U.S. schools.

a. What Expectations Do Parents Bring to This Relationship from Previous School-Parent Experiences?

Ethiopian family members bring a host of challenging historical and contemporary life experiences as well as wealth of opportunities to their interactions with schools and their relationships with teachers. They also have social/emotional issues and language barriers depending on their life experiences. The participating parents come from a school system in Ethiopia where parent-teacher relationships are not part of the culture, and partnership is not expected or known. While parents assume mainly parenting and child nurturing roles while occasionally supporting schools with volunteer labor and money, they believe that educating a child is the teachers' and administrators' duties, and

that the child has responsibility for his/her own learning. They also have different expectations for their children in terms of respecting and listening to teachers instead of advancing their opinions. This confirms the idea that child-rearing and educating attitudes and practices are also related to ethnic and cultural background (Holden & Cullingford, 2000). Teachers and school administrators are respected and regarded as bearers of knowledge; asking them questions may be viewed as questioning their authorities and interfering with their work. Additionally, besides the different school system, many parents do not see themselves as productive members of the school community because they have low opinions of their own language and academic skills. As Valdes (1996) states, this leads to parents' thinking of their job as one of shaping behavior and the school's job as academics because they do not feel competent to deal with school personnel.

Research literature on culture clashes or cultural difference between school and immigrant families indicates that these impact children's academic achievement (Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Fuligni, 1997; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000; Valdes, 1996). Fulgini (1997) highlights the relative impact of family background and parental attitudes on immigrant children's academic achievement. Carreón et al. (2005) state that due to language and cultural differences as well as burden of structuring new lives for their families, immigrant parents have limited power to define their roles or actions, and they just agree with and support the structures and dynamics already in place. Additionally, Valdes (1996) points out that, for the same reasons, immigrant parents' support assume that their role in their children's K-12 education is to shape their children's character instead of giving direct academic support. The lack of parent agency

in regards to their child's education and school structures, together with cultural differences, may cause frustration and be a source of unspoken tension between parents and teachers.

An instance of culture clash witnessed between Ethiopian families and the school was the IEP meeting of Mrs. Lemlem and Mrs. Aisha. The IEP team provoked an oppositional response from Mrs. Lemlem who openly questioned the purpose and goal of the meeting. The IEP related terms like "disability," a term the parents know as related to some disabled people who use crunches, fueled emotions and made the parents nervous. Therefore, parent education is needed in this area. Building positive relationships with parents by learning about their past educational experiences, cultural backgrounds and connecting the home and school environments is also essential for building relationships and having effective partnerships (Gonzalez, Amanti, & Moll, 2005; Moll and Gonzalez, 1997). Teachers must recognize and utilize a historically and culturally developed and accumulated knowledge of parents and communities, which Moll and colleagues call "funds of knowledge." The "funds of knowledge" approach recognizes students' cultures, languages, and literacy experiences as assets and that should be treated as resources for classroom teaching.

Another instance of culture clash observed was when Mrs. Almaz asked Mrs. Emma for advice and permission to take Lucy Ethiopia with her during academic calendar. Mrs. Emma left the decision for Mrs. Almaz, which Mrs. Almaz did not like because she perceived Mrs. Emma as more knowledgeable than her and she could make a better decision for her. Mrs. Almaz comes from cultural background where a teacher is

like a sage and tells parents what to do and to not do, and a parent is obedient and passive receptor.

Despite the cultural clashes and difficulties they face in their relationships and partnerships with teachers/school personnel, Ethiopian immigrant parents bring with them assets that include some English language proficiency, hard work and resilience, respect for school and teachers, and great value for education, which are all elements for a child's success in school. Although parents and teachers have high expectation for the select children and claim that they work hard to ensure the children's learning and growth, parents "working hard" is conceptually different from what teachers and schools expect in academics context as they do not have similar experiences with teachers. Parents work hard to provide for their families and help their children at home with their homework as much as possible. Yet, they acknowledge that they lack the knowledge and skills needed. Some of them do not even know the name of their child's school. Parents' invisibility in schools for the most part of the academic year makes it hard for them and makes them feel overwhelmed when they walk to a school building. The parent-teacher conference is a thirty minute scheduled meeting between a teacher and parents that takes place twice in a given academic year in fall and spring seasons. Teacher-parent conferences provide the opportunity to increase communication between parents and teachers, build positive relationships, keep parents informed about their child's progress, and help them to develop a plan for the student's future; the parents in this study rarely took advantage of these opportunities due to the factors described above. At the same time, with the exception of Mrs. Emma, the teachers did not devote enough time and

energy for parent outreach through home visits or community involvement when parents were not able to attend the conferences.

Factors that shape parent-teacher relationships and partnership efforts include race, ethnicity, religion, class, and multilingual proficiency that parents and teachers bring to their relationships. All the parents come from low SES backgrounds; they are all black in terms of their races; they are varied in their ethnicity; they have strong convictions with respect to religion; and they have some English language proficiency besides their own bilingual and multilingual proficiency. Being a woman was noted to involve inherently more responsibilities at home and outside home. Being in a new environment for the immigrant parents presents difficulties in their transitions to the U.S. as well as their lives and works in general. The participating parents faced incongruity in their great expectations for how their life would be easy and restful in the U.S. prior to their immigration, and the realities with respect to work and life in the U.S., which is difficult and earned with hard work.

b. What Are the Chief Areas of Concern Expressed By Parents and Teachers, and How Have They Been Addressed?

This study has shown some areas of concern expressed by Parents and teachers, and how have they been addressed. There are disparities between the Ethiopian immigrant parents/child, and their teachers, caused by lack of English language proficiency, cultural differences, educational levels, expectations, and visibility of parents as well as teachers' outreach to parents, which impacts their perceptions of their relationships and partnerships. The study also revealed that there are dissimilarities between in school expectations, practices, and belief systems in the U.S. and Ethiopia. This is not a problem in itself, but the lack of teacher capacity to work with these

differences sometimes resulted in tension or even conflict. School practices reflect the values and social norms of society, which differ from the norms of immigrant families.

Additionally, despite the parents' strong ambition for their children's education, their limited English proficiency is a significant obstacle besides their busy work schedules which did not allow them to attend school events such as Back to School Night and/or parent-teacher conference. Parents' unfamiliarity with the Special Education IEP and the related words like "disability" that Mr. Bedilu and Mrs. Lemlem perceived as pejorative is another concern, which was also teachers' concern as there was hardly mutual understanding to reach on consensus in the best interest of the child.

Furthermore, parents' expectation of teaching as a sole duty of teachers is another concern for teachers. The participant teachers were concerned about academic support children get from the parents at home, expressing the general reluctance of parents to attend school events and activities and to show that they actively help their children at home with school related work. For example, all the parents, except Mrs. Almaz, reported their absence from Back to School Night and parent-teacher conferences and their inability to develop strong partnership with their children's teachers due to their busy work schedules and lack of adequate English language proficiency. Mrs. Almaz was different in that she arranged her work schedule so that she could go to school and proactively seek out information from Lucy's teacher and other teachers she ran into. She takes Lucy to school every morning and picks her up after school, which she says gave her an opportunity to meet and chat with teachers. In addition to work and language barriers, all parents mentioned that their insufficient knowledge of the school

system and their limited academic background stand in their way of effective school engagement for their children's educational success.

The teachers' personal, social, and professional backgrounds are interwoven with their backgrounds, and with their ways of thinking and understanding that are vital components of their practice (Gibbs & Powell, 2012). Therefore, it was important to study each case participant holistically in order to draw contextualized and complete conclusions. It was also important to understand how the teachers thought about parent-teacher relationships, and how they negotiated the complex nature of their partnerships with schools.

All the teacher participants asserted that good relationships and partnerships with parents significantly benefited their students. However, two of the teachers, Mrs. Aisha and Mrs. Maria, varied in their perceptions and practices while one, Mrs. Emma, showed extra effort in parent outreach to positively impact the student. The perspectives of teachers on their relationships and partnerships with parents included descriptions of how they tried to establish and maintain relationships with parents, understand expectations parents bring from previous school-parent experiences, and help parents understand the rationale to partner with teachers/schools.

The teachers and parents communicated with each other using the district cultural liaison in formal scheduled meetings like the student behavior of Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria, the IEP meeting of Mrs. Lemlem and Mrs. Aisha, and the parent-teacher conference of Mrs. Almaz and Mrs. Emma. Mrs. Emma makes home visits to the student's home while Mrs. Maria and Mrs. Aisha stated they never did home visits to their students' homes. Mrs. Aisha said that for her, the student was the main channel

between home and school communication. None of the teachers reported that they encouraged the parents to join the Parent Teacher Association or other parent groups at their child's school or in the district.

The teachers discussed some of the rewards and challenges of teaching in a school that primarily serves low-income immigrant families like these selected schools. Mrs. Aisha and Mrs. Maria claimed that they were positive role models for the immigrant and refugee children of the SES, especially as related to their racial groups. The challenges they expressed were difficulty in effectively communicating with the parents and the incongruent expectations and roles of the teachers and the parents in the education of a child. However, Mrs. Emma thinks that she is in a better school and that she is able to provide a better education and positively impact parent-school relations. When Mrs. Emma talked about teaching in high SES school where the students get the education they need, she indicated that she helps and supports the low SES students and their parents so that they get the education they need to improve their lives.

In response to policy-focused matters, Mrs. Emma had some thoughts about changes that needed to be made in teachers' work with parents. She argued strongly that teachers needed to see their jobs as an extension of their students' homes and beyond the regular school hours: home visits and extra tutoring for students who needed it should not be peripheral activities to teaching. Mrs. Emma states that, to better address the child's and his/her parents' needs, teachers should strategically and systematically work with the child's parents by making home visits. Mrs. Emma does not believe that her colleagues are doing a good job with respect to serving as active agents between homes and school. She also does not believe that there is the structure and system for effective interaction

and partnership with parents, and every teacher does what s/he believes with this respect. Furthermore, she indicated that she does not have the power to make changes to policies related to structure, system, or other issues previously mentioned and she just assumes responsibility for herself as a change agent that she wishes other teachers would do too.

This study confirms this Chavkin's (2000) research, which suggests that teachers can lead the way in the development of comprehensive family and community involvement policies in their school districts. The author posits that teachers can locate existing family/community involvement policies and ask for a review, while also reminding their school districts about the importance of a strong support system. Teachers can remind the district leadership that discussion of district wide policy should consider budget/resource allocations, assessment of outcomes, and the collaboration process. This research suggests that teachers have the responsibility for initiating and building relationships with immigrant parents, which the results of this study confirm. Therefore, the researcher concludes that teachers should take active role to initiate and build relationships with parents of immigrant families who have different experience and expectation r regarding parent-teacher relationships. This study also supports the conclusions of Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) who argue that "the role of the teacher is that of a mediator in multiple contexts (p. 127)." Teachers should take on the roles of mediators and active agents in conducting household visits as well as bridging the gaps between homes and school as well as between communities and the university.

c. What Has Helped Parents and Teachers to Effectively Establish and Maintain their Relationships and how They Negotiate Their Multiple Perspectives and Diverse Backgrounds?

In order to mediate the barriers and hurdles between Ethiopian parents and teachers, the teachers assumed different roles. By exposing herself to the diversity of her students and their families, Mrs. Emma portrayed herself as a mindful veteran teacher who understands the tacit and explicit rules of different cultures in order to effectively forge the home-school relationships and partnerships. She saw herself as a "good mother" who nurtured and advocated for all of her children. Mrs. Emma goes extra miles and she devotes her personal time and energy to ensure a child's learning and growth is met as she did with Lucy when she was behind academically. She took extra time and tutored Lucy at school and at her home, where also she modeled Mrs. Almaz how to work on Lucy's literacy and numeracy skills. Mrs. Aisha's availability when the parents need her, which she calls "open door policy"; high expectation for self and others; and non-verbal cues and pictures to supplement communication stand out as a way to work with Teklu's parents. Mrs. Aisha states that her classroom doors are open and she is flexible with time for parents to meet with her as they want and can. Mrs. Maria takes a role of strict teacher who yells at her students to encourage students to behave and move forward.

The Ethiopian immigrant parents in Cases One and Two took a more reactive stance to issues, due to cultural misunderstandings and the imbalance of power between the immigrant parents and the professionals with institutional authority. They rarely went to meetings when they were invited to schools. The saying "silence is a good virtue and silence is gold," are common in Ethiopian culture, and it seems that the immigrant

parents kept their silence in regards to schools. In Case One and Case Two the parents took reactive stances in their meetings with teachers, which may have contributed to the tension in parent-teacher relationships. In parent-teacher conferences, Mrs. Lemlem argued against the IEP for Teklu, and Mrs. Kitile against Obsa's behavior report from Mrs. Maria and defended her child. Mrs. Almaz, in contrast, took a stance of information seeking and support from Mrs. Emma for Lucy's learning. It may be the Mrs. Emma's home visits and other efforts at parent outreach helped create the conditions for more positive, and less reactive, interactions between herself and the parents. Both parent and teachers stances and actions contribute to shaping the parent-teacher relationship.

Additionally, cultural liaisons are instrumental in facilitating parent-teacher communication and collaboration. They facilitate communication and understanding between families, school, and community. They interpret and translate district documents, assist with department planning and communication planning across the district, interpret for attendees at district meetings and disciplinary hearings and promote interpretation services and best practice across the district. They also assist in providing district-wide translation and interpretation services as well as bilingual communications within the district and to the community.

Recommendations

Ethiopian parents bring experiences and issues, and many positive attributes to relationship with their children's teachers. Being in a new environment, there are gaps between expectations and realities with respect to work and life in the U.S.; they must navigate a new system of education, language and cultural differences; they face economic hardship, and past traumas, especially if they are refugees; they suffer from

separation from their family members back home and must shoulder financial responsibility for extended families in Ethiopia. Refugees are distinct from immigrants in that they may have traumatic experiences of loss and sufferings that impact their relationships with teachers. They have also never to surrender personality to any foreign force as grounded in defeating the Mussolini Italy that ruled Ethiopia for only five years, from 1936 t0 1941. The parents expressed that they can handle any difficult situation they face in their transition to their new world, the U.S. Additionally, it is necessary to understand that there are differences among refugees with respect to where they have lived, for example, whether they come from (urban environments or refugee camps). Mr. Bedilu, for example, reported he suffered a lot of hardships and he had health concerns in a refugee camp in Kenya. However, he did not have the same issue in Egypt and Europe as a refugee. Mrs. Kitile comes from a traditional culture which values the social before business, relationships more than work. She expected Mrs. Maria would interrupt teaching to greet and talk to her when she returned to the classroom, which did not happen that provoked anger and conflict between Mrs. Kitile and Mrs. Maria.

Recommendations for Practice

These recommendations are made based on the findings and conclusions resulting from this research, which attempted to fill the gap in the research literature on new ways to think about specific immigrant parent involvement in schools. The study sought to explore the perspectives of elementary teachers and Ethiopian immigrant parents on parent-school relations and the education of their Ethiopian children. Each parent-teacher dyad is a case and the purpose was to discover, understand, and gain insight into each case; generalizing from each case to their respective social groups is not the primary

concern and can be problematic. In this section of the chapter, implications for teachers who work with Ethiopian immigrants will be discussed, as well as implications for further research and study.

The implications for teachers discussed here are related to understanding the unique personal, social, educational, and cultural backgrounds that parents and teachers bring to their relationship in order to better meet the needs of increasingly diverse classroom, particularly immigrant students. Elements discussed in this study include: the expectations parents bring to this relationship from previous school-parent experiences; concerns expressed by parents and teachers, and how they have been addressed; the strategies teachers used for their interactions and relationships with the parents; and how they negotiated their multiple perspectives and diverse backgrounds.

Helping Parents Understand the Rationale to Partner with Teachers/Schools. This study showed that there is a need for teacher professional development on how to promote parent engagement in school. Students spend a greater amount of their time outside the school as compared to the hours they spend in school. Therefore, teachers need strategies for how to get this message across to parents. Teachers should encourage parents and other community members of all races and ethnicities, regardless of their geographical setting and socioeconomic status, to feel connected to the school/district and attempt to establish face-to-face communication with them. Teachers can use a survey to identify what the needs and desires of the families are in order to provide family engagement opportunities. Additionally, finding feasible meeting times for all partners in a child's education so that all perspectives are heard would help communication and collaboration, and clear-up misunderstandings among the

partners. Professional development for teachers should include the following: developing a clear vision for parent engagement among school staff; creating a welcoming environment for parent volunteers; showing teachers how to make phone calls home, especially after negative experiences, and establishing a regular schedule and structure for doing so; and developing personal relationships with families through home visits and other forms of immigrant parent outreach that have shown to be successful. .

Establishing and maintaining relationships with parents. Establishing and maintaining relationships with parents is integral to effective teaching. This is because parents' role in the development of their children and in their support of schools is well established (Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Sheldon, 2008; Warren, 2005). For example, Larocque and colleagues (2011) argue that the value of parental participation is widely accepted, but a great challenge facing educators is promoting and maintaining relationships with parents of increasingly diverse students.

Cultural comparisons. This section identifies cultural similarities and differences that would be useful for a teacher to know when working with Ethiopian immigrant students and parents. How power and authority are conceptualized, orientations toward education, ideas of success and failure, the nature of the family, connection to nation of origin are included in this section.

In terms of power and authority, the Ethiopian immigrant parents in this study perceived teachers as authority figures and as all-powerful to make all decisions. Mrs. Almaz, for example, asked Mrs. Emma to excuse Lucy from school assuming that the teacher can do it all by herself. The parents' orientation toward education is based on their past experience as students themselves in Ethiopia, where teachers are viewed as

figure of knowledge and authority in their field of study. With respect to the nature of the family, as Mrs. Aisha indicated in her interview, the parents come from intact family that includes the extended family. Mrs. Almaz's plan to go to Ethiopia for two months of school time with her child to visit her sick mother demonstrates this. Mrs. Almaz indicated that Lucy's grandmother was longing to see her and she also wanted to see her mother at any cost of time and money, regardless of the learning Lucy was going to miss out on.

Assets. As a parent myself, I realize that parents possess valuable knowledge about their children. They know their children's preferred approaches to solving problems, their strengths and weaknesses, their motivation and interests, and their disposition for learning. During my observations of parent-teacher meetings, I learned that Ethiopian parents have useful inside information teachers need for classroom instruction. Mrs. Kitile shared that Obsa is detail oriented and he rarely forgets things done to him and that he holds grunge when he is hurt. She cautioned Mrs. Aisha to speak slowly and gently to Obsa and not to disappoint him. Also, Mrs. Lemlem revealed in the IEP meeting that Teklu is aloof in behavior and needs time to meet and mingle with is classmates. Mrs. Almaz too stated that Lucy loves art and she bought her materials to practice more at home. Ethiopian immigrant parents rarely meet with teachers, but when they do, they offer teachers useful inside information they would not get otherwise.

As discussed, Ethiopian immigrants like Mrs. Kitile, Mrs. Lemlem and Mr. Bedilu, and Mrs. Almaz bring assets such as some English proficiency (English is a medium of instruction in secondary and tertiary levels in Ethiopia), good discipline (family and church play strong roles), a good math background, respect for school and

teacher and a strong value for education, perseverance and many stories of survival, and an intact family unit, all of which can be used as support for student success. In addition to these assets, teachers and schools should take advantage of local community resources like churches, African Community Center and Ethiopian Community Development Center, and the Denver Ethiopian Yellow Page for information that may prove useful in their work with Ethiopian immigrant parents.

Strategies for success. This section identifies potential strategies teachers can use to learn more about their students, how they can use the assets of their students/parents to enhance their students' educational experience, as well as other important information teachers can use to better teach Ethiopian students. School practices reflect the social norms of society, and the norms differ from those of Ethiopian families. Teacher and school practices reflect different conceptions of childhood and child development than those of the immigrant parents. Therefore, teachers need strategies to work with students and parents from Ethiopian and other cultures such as getting to "know" the parents and where they come from in terms of their educational background, culture, language, expectations, school practices, family members and friends, and community resources. When they first meet with them, teachers should avoid generalizations and assumptions about the family and children. Also, teachers need to provide structure, consistency, and clear expectations about the student learning and parent relationship and school engagement from the beginning. Teachers can use the assets of their students' parents to enhance the student's educational experience, which requires teachers' openness willingness to engage in intercultural exchange.

Relationship and socialization take priority in developing trust with Ethiopian parents. For example, traditionally coffee brings people together and the coffee ceremony is a great social event in Ethiopia and now among the Ethiopian community in the Denver metro area. Schools may take advantage of this ritual coffee ceremony at school or at homes for social networking and information seeking opportunities. Additionally, home visits and opportunity for students to write their stories were useful ways for Mrs. Emma and Mrs. Aisha to interact with the parents. Furthermore, knowing and being able to locate the school and district resources like cultural liaisons is integral in fostering communication and partnership with parents.

Ideas of success and failure. Some educational programs like Special Education are unfamiliar to Ethiopian immigrant parents and words like "disability" may provoke emotions and resistance because they come from a different educational system in Ethiopia that does not have such a program, and they attach meanings such as "ill-health" and "inept." Special education is just now being introduced in the Ethiopian educational system, and parents who have immigrated to the United States do not know about such programs. The type of school events and meetings like assessment (for SpEd or RtI), ELA Parent Night, Conference or Meeting with school staff, RtI process (meeting), SARB (Student Attendance Review Board), Suspension or Expulsion (removing a student from a school), IEP Meeting or Reevaluation (initial meeting to determine eligibility and disability, triennial/reevaluation meeting, annual review, response to intervention (RtI)), parent phone call (for confirming or scheduling a meeting), Family Literacy Program Class Visit, Title I Night, and Child Find are unfamiliar and can be intimidating for Ethiopian immigrants as they come from an experience of contacts with

a school only when a child is disruptive and/or when a child faces some disciplinary measures.

When it comes to ideas of success and failure, the early years of life are vital, having a lasting effect upon the individual (Getahun, 2005). Ethiopian parents highly value education as the main means of upward mobility, and the goal most parents set for their children is to become highly paid professionals like a doctor, a physician. Failure in school can be viewed as an indicator of failure in other life venues. Generally, Ethiopians tend to rely upon the old, proven ways of bringing up their children in a conservative tradition, and children are expected to obey adults in home and at school. Older people view children as subordinates who need to be recipients of knowledge, which is tacitly reinforced in the school system in Ethiopia in terms of teacher-student relationships.

As was the case with Teklu's parents, most parents want their children to quickly venture into and acculturate to the American culture lest the children fall behind in English and academics. This results in the likelihood that the home language will atrophy over time. Consequently, miscommunication and then role reversal may result between parents and children as the children become proficient in English and control external communication with, for example, schools, taking hospital appointments, and bill payments. Mr. Bedilu revealed in the interview that Teklu talks to him only in Amharic as he knows that his father does not know enough English. Most parents do not understand the importance of being bilingual and bicultural for their children and they also need education with this regard.

Implications for Research

The past and contemporary political and economic conditions in Ethiopia are forcing Ethiopians to leave their country. The continent of Africa is vast, complex, and deep beyond any possible measure. Ethiopia is a multiethnic country and it is too diverse to be condensed under the umbrella study of Africa. There is a need to develop greater understanding of the ethnic groups and their languages, as they share similarities and dissimilarities. An implication of this is that generalization of a study on immigrants from Africa in the U.S. is far from the reality and it does not recognize or respect the human diversity of the ethnic groups in Africa. Therefore, future research must focus on immigrants from specific countries and their ethnic groups from Africa.

Even though there is a plethora of research on experiences of immigrant children and families in public schools in the U.S., few of them comprehensively capture the specific group differences and experiences that affect the contemporary African immigrants in social and educational settings (Arthur, 2000; Awokoya, 2009; Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011), which the present study set out to investigate. Harushimana & Awokoya, for example, make the case that despite the significant increase of the number and diversity of African-born immigrants in the United States of America, the education system does not recognize their presence and does little to facilitate their integration through the implementation of necessary curricular adjustments. Additionally, Awokoya & Clark argue that:

> Little is known about Black immigrants' day to day experiences in academic settings, because studies focusing on these types of experiences often statistically group these children with African-American children on the basis of "race" and

> the data compiled is rarely disaggregated on the basis of any other social identity dimension. (p.49).

The researchers indicate that with such understanding in hand, the schooling experiences of Black immigrant youth in particular could be systematically improved and sustained if their voices are heard on a case by case basis in order to avoid generalizations. In this way, understanding of Black immigrants and their children's educational needs will become more nuanced, more thorough, and ultimately, more accurate both pre and post immigration, which the present study attempted to do with Ethiopian immigrants and their children's teachers.

While the findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature, this research has raised many questions in need of further investigation:

1. How do immigrant parents view teachers based on their cultural expectations for teachers?
2. Is the conflict seen between teachers and parents in the United States the same in Ethiopia, or other countries? Does it have to do with how teachers are socialized in the U.S.?
3. How does the ethnicity of teachers impact their relations with to immigrant parents?
4. What are some of the cultural, class, ethnic, and linguistic differences among Ethiopian parents, and how does the impact their relations and communication?
5. What are principals' perspectives and expectations for staff regarding Ethiopian immigrants, and how do principals set the tone for school climate/culture related to immigrants?
6. How can a focus on educational specialists, such as Special Education, English Language Acquisition, and school mental health professionals contribute to the study immigrant and refugee families' experiences in public schools as their children get services from these academic programs?
7. What is the role of front line staff such as clerical, admissions office personnel, and school office managers who are often seen by immigrant families as gate-keepers and/or gate-ways?

Summary

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the perspectives of Ethiopian immigrant parents and elementary teachers on their experiences regarding their relationships in the education of select Ethiopian children. This study is important because parent-teacher relationships and their perspectives are crucial in student learning and growth (Epstein, 2009 & Sheldon, 2008). Thus, perspectives of parents and teachers paired on select Ethiopian children were studied. Data were collected from the participants, and the researchers' observations of parent-teacher interactions.

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APPENDIX A

INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

DATE: **January 11, 2014**

TO: **Keno Nagasa, MA, EdD Candidate**

FROM: **University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB**

PROJECT TITLE: Perspectives of Elementary Teachers and Ethiopian Immigrant Parents on Parent-Teacher Relations and the Education of Ethiopian children.

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: **APPROVED**

APPROVAL DATE: **January 112014**

EXPIRATION DATE: **January 11, 2018**

REVIEW TYPE: **Exempt Review**

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of January 11, 2018.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Keno -

Best wishes with your research. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Table 6

Personal Data and Educational Background

Pseudonym & age	Education background	Occupation (current) & years of experience	Occupation (in Ethiopia)	Race/ ethnicity	Language	Years in US	Child, grade level, & school

Parent Background

1. Why, how, and when did you come to the United States?
2. What prompted that decision?
3. How is life and work t/here?
4. Tell me about a typical day in your life and work. Describe the contexts of your daily routines.
5. Describe your past experiences with schools.
6. What resources, knowledge and skills do you have to support you with your goals for your child's academic and social success?
7. What social networks and support groups do you have to support you with your goals for your child's academic and social success?
8. Do you have community learning center that you can take your child after school or on the weekends?
9. Would you still come to the U.S. had you known the life experiences you have had as an immigrant?

Parent and the Student

10. Do you believe that you have control over your child's learning and are able to make a difference in the life of your child? Explain
11. What do you see as the purpose of education?

12. How does your child's education enter into your routines?
13. How much does your child's education and interaction with his/her teacher play into your routines?
14. What is it like to raise and educate a child in the United States and relate to the child's teacher? Probe here for information.
15. What interests, hobbies, subjects, etc. does your child like or would like to learn more about?
16. What are your expectations for your child and what you would like to see your child learn?
17. What are your expectations in terms of curriculum and classroom norms for your child's learning?
18. How would you describe your child's current academic performance?
19. What topics, projects, and assessments is your child working on at school and home?
20. How can you assist and support what is being taught in school.
21. What ideas do you have for improving your child's academic performance?
22. What information do you know and need about your child's education or school programs?
23. What aspirations do you have for your child's learning and growth, and what practical strategies do you use towards accomplishing the goals?
24. How often do you discuss homework, school activities and education's importance with your child?
25. Do you provide time, space and support for homework on a daily basis at your home, school, and/or in your community or with family?
26. Do you have an established daily routine for your child's homework and other school-related activities?
27. Do you read with your child at home, and how often?

Parent and Teacher

28. Do you think that you have strong and positive interaction and collaboration experience with your child's teacher and school in general?

29. Tell me about your relationship with your child's teacher (challenges/successes). Probe ideas presented.
30. What are chief areas of concern, and how have they been addressed in your interactions with the teacher?
31. Do you plan to keep your child in the same school and with this particular teacher that you have? Explain
32. What has helped you to effectively establish and maintain your relationships with the teacher?
33. What positive attributes have you noticed in your interactions and experiences with the teacher, and how have the attributes been useful for your child's learning?
34. Tell me what it looks, sounds, and/or feels like to interact with the teacher in the interest of your child's learning.
35. What forms of communication and relationships appear to best support your child's learning?
36. What are your experiences and expectations for your child's learning and your relationship with your child's teacher/school?
37. If you were a teacher, what would you do differently in terms of parent relationship and child learning?
38. Do you attend parent-teacher conferences and school or class events?
39. Do you initiate meetings with your child's teacher and learn about the school curriculum, and how to become involved in activities?
40. How often do you communicate with the teacher(s) about your child's progress and/or concerns throughout the year and share your input, questions, and ideas?
41. What variables (social, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, multilingual proficiency) do you think shape your relationship with your child's teacher?
42. Do you have encounters with the teachers other than in the school? (At the store, church, neighborhood, etc.)

Policy-Focused Questions:

43. What are some of the rewards and challenges of raising and educating a child in the United States? (Probe: compare current experiences with experiences in Ethiopia)

44. If you could make changes in your child's school with respect to interaction and collaboration with parents, what might those be?

45. Do you believe that you have the structure and system for effective interaction and partnership with your child's teacher in your school?

46. Do you believe that you have the power to propose and make changes to policies related to structure, system, or other issues previously mentioned?

47. How could changes in policy with this respect affect your relationship with the school in general and your child's teacher in particular?

48. Explain the "policy" you would suggest for your school, district, and all low SES districts in general regarding parent engagement in education and interaction with teacher.

49. Do you have any additional reflective thoughts/noticing/wonderings/concerns?

School/District & Ethiopian Families

50. What supports do you have in your school/district that facilitate your interaction and positive experience with the parents?

51. Do you have family resource centers in school/district that you turn to if need be?

52. How often do you visit their child's school?

53. Do you volunteer at school?

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Table 7

Personal Data and Educational Background

Pseudonym & age	Education background	Occupation (current) & years of experience	Occupation (in Ethiopia)	Race/ ethnicity	Language	Years in US	Child, grade level, & school

Teacher Background

1. When did you decide to go into teaching?

2. What prompted that decision?

3. What do you see as the purpose of education?

4. How does family or community enter into how you think about teaching?

5. How much does family or community play into the work that gets done in your classroom?

Teacher & Ethiopian Student

6. Tell me about this particular Ethiopian student in your classroom this past year (challenges/strengths they may have). (Probe for ideas presented)

7. If there are challenges, provide examples, explain what you have done about the challenges, and what you think might have done differently?

8. What is it like to teach and relate to the child? (Probe here for concrete examples)

9. How would you describe this student's current academic performance?

10. What are your expectations for the student and how would you like his/her parents to support the child's learning?

11. What information do you have about the student's educational background, culture, and family background? What more would you like to learn?

12. What forms of communication and relationships appear to best support student learning?

13. How do you encourage this particular Ethiopian student to discuss school and homework with his/her family?

14. How do you help this particular Ethiopian student and his/her family to understand the school/class rules and homework expectations, including positive supports?

Teacher and Ethiopian Parents

15. What is it like to relate to this particular Ethiopian student's parents? (Probe here for concrete examples)

16. Please tell me your perspectives on your interactions and collaborations with the parents of this particular Ethiopian student.

17. What has helped you to effectively establish and maintain your relationships with the parents?

18. What positive attributes, knowledge, skills, and history have you noticed in your interactions and experiences with the parents, and how have these been useful for the child's learning?

19. What variables (social, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, multilingual proficiency) do you think shape your relationship with the students' parents?

20. Tell me what it looks, sounds, and/or feels like to interact with Ethiopian immigrant parents in the interest of their child's learning.

21. What are chief areas of concern, and how have they been addressed in your interactions with the parents?

22. How can you get the parent's assistance and support for what is being taught in school?

23. What ideas do you have for ways to improve academic performance and parent involvement for this child?

24. How do you communicate with students and families about student progress and/or concerns throughout the year?

25. How do you invite family input, questions, and ideas in student progress, and what does that look like? How often does this occur?

26. How often do you meet with the parents?

27. What do you do when the parents you want to see do not come to the school?

28. What do you think can be done to attract parents who are difficult to reach?

29. Do you have encounters with the parents other than in the school (at the store, church, in the neighborhood, etc.)?

30. Do you visit your students' homes? Please talk to me a little more about this.

31. Do you encourage parents to meet with you and learn about school curriculum, and how to become involved in activities?

32. Do you encourage parents to join the Parent Teacher Association or other parent groups at their child's school or in the district?

33. Have you become involved in your students' community activities?

School/District & Ethiopian Families

34. What supports do you have in your school/district that facilitate your interaction and positive experience with the parents?

35. Do you have family resource centers in school/district that you turn to if need be?

Policy-Focused Questions:

36. What are some of the rewards and challenges of teaching in a school that primarily serves low SES students like the point in case? Probe: compare current school experiences with experiences in other schools in which you have taught.

37. If you could make changes in your practice to better address the child's and his/her parents' needs, what might that look like?

38. If you could make changes in your school with respect to interaction and collaboration with parents, what might those be?

39. Do you believe that you have the structure and system for effective interaction and partnership with this kind of parents?

40. In your school and/or within the district, do you believe you have the power to make changes to policies related to structure, system, or other issues previously mentioned?

41. How could changes in policy in this respect affect what you do in the classroom and your relationship with the parents?

42. Explain the "policy" you would suggest for your school, district, and all low SES districts in general regarding parent engagement in education and interaction with teacher.

43. Do you have any additional reflective thoughts/noticing/wonderings/concerns?

APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Participant Observation Protocol, according to Spradley (1980):

- First, participant observers come to a social situation with the dual purpose of both participation and observation.
- Second, participant observers strive to become explicitly aware of phenomena that ordinary participants usually filter out of conscious awareness in everyday life.
- Third, in cultivating their explicit awareness, participant observers use a wide-angle lens to take in more of the experience with greater attention to detail.
- Fourth, participant observers need to negotiate the insider/outsider experience, with different circumstances placing the observer at different ends of this continuum of experience.
- Fifth, participant observers engage in more frequent and more detailed introspection about social experiences than the ordinary participant typically does.
- Finally, the observer engages in record keeping throughout the process of participating in a social experience.

Spradley also discusses five degrees of participation in participant observation research.

- First, the non-participant collects and analyzes data completely outside of the social situation, using other data sources to draw their conclusions.
- Second, a passive participant enters into the space and time of the social situation, but acts as a completely distanced observer.
- Third, a moderate participant enters into a passive role intrinsic to the social situation.
- An active participant seeks to do what other people are doing, not merely to gain acceptance, but to more fully learn the rules for cultural behavior.
- Finally, complete participants immerse in social situations as ordinary participants.

The researcher took an active participant-observer stance in the present study. The raw field notes as well as the researcher's post-hoc typed elaboration of the notes were followed by summary, descriptive write-up of the observation (scene-setting and

highlights), analysis and interpretation of the scene (using the above and below guiding questions), and how the researcher's presence in the meeting impacted the event.

Guiding questions for taking field notes:

1. Describe the scene, paying attention all sensory perception. If it seems useful, draw a map of the setting, indicating the position and movement of persons. Who is present? Who is absent?

2. Look for the structure of the situation: are the participants differentiated from each other, as, e.g., leaders and followers, or those with more or less status? Is status differentiation or equality represented in dress, behavior, symbolic markers, differing prerogatives? How do people interact with each other?

3. Are there any elements of ritual, either formal or informal, in what I observe? How do I interpret the meaning and effect of these ritualized behaviors?

4. What appear to be the unspoken – or spoken -- rules that underlie this event or activity? Is there any mechanism for correcting a distortion or a mistake? Is there any formal authority? To what extent is it respected? Do people seem to follow the rules, explicit or tacit, or do they bend them?

5. Is the event characterized more by order and agreement or conflict and disorder?

6. Do all participants seem to be deriving the same benefits or satisfactions from participation? Do they have means of communicating positive or negative judgments about the situation?

7. What shared values or assumptions are reinforced (or contested) through this event?

Guiding questions for final reflection of the observations:

8. Did the parent and teacher great each other cordially on arrival (first impression)?

9. What language is used between the teacher and the parent for communication during the parent-teacher conference? Are they able to communicate in a common language?

10. What is the conference about (student progress report, discipline issues, special education assignment/exit, etc.)?

11. Do they seem friendly, angry, emotional, etc.?

12. Does the teacher encourage the parent(s) to ask questions, etc.?

13. Any nonverbal cues, subtle nuances and/or behaviors exhibited during their conversation in the classroom?

APPENDIX E

NARRATIVES OF MRS. KITILE- CASE ONE

Mrs. Kitile: Narrative of Emigration, Arrival, and New Life in America

Mrs. Kitile comes from Oromo ethnic group and she speaks Oromo language (an Afro-Asiatic language, which is the most widely spoken tongue in the family's Cushitic branch). She also speaks Amharic (a Semitic language spoken in Ethiopia), and some English. In 2012, Mrs. Kitile, together with her husband Mr. Abdi and their son Obsa, took her first step toward winning a Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery to come to the U.S.

Emigration. Mrs. Kitile left Ethiopia for the U.S. through the DV Lottery program. She shares her experiences and encounters as follows:

> 2012 is my significant number that changed my life—I won a DV Lottery to my relief. I was a Poly Technic Institute 1st year student with a dream to become a civil engineer. Winning a DV Lottery to the U.S. with my husband and son, I left my local towns of Adama, Zeway, Shashemene, Awasa, etc. in the southern beautiful Ethiopia where I was born and bred. On arrival, my American first impression was just as perfect as I had imagined—a huge airport, a big high ways, many cars, colored trees, and brighter world.

Winning a DV Lottery was a means Mrs. Kitile and her family used to legally enter the U.S. They voluntarily came to the U.S. and the itinerary and the related expenses were all their full responsibility. Mrs. Kitile states that she came to the U.S. for a better opportunity for herself and her family, and thus they sold whatever they had in their country and borrowed some money from her sister to cover their visa processing and air plane tickets costs to come to the U.S.

Arrival. Mrs. Kitile with her family was sponsored by her sister who came to the U.S. three years earlier. Mrs. Kitile recounts the first moment when they arrived at the Denver International Air Port as follows, "I was overwhelmed with everything. The people are different; the language is difficult; the environment is brand new; and it feels like I am out of place." When Mrs. Kitile and her family reached her sister's home, she says, "I was exhilarated to see my older sister and her family. The feast was great. I also

met some old friends". Mrs. Kitile recollects her first impression at her sister's home as follows:

> Everything is bright and big, and the food and drink is a lot. I was taken by the huge coffee cups. There are some old friends and they all look happy. I was overwhelmed and I feel like I am the luckiest person to be here, even so with my children. You know, this is not for everybody…I feel like it's for a few chosen ones…LOL…We are counting our ages and blessings from now on….forget the past. We are starting new and promised life in the Promised Land, the U.S.

Expectations and reality. Mrs. Kitile's mixed feelings of excitement to be in the U.S. and worries about life and work begins in a couple of weeks as the festive times of "Welcome to the U.S.!" starts to shade and everyday normal life begins in her sister's home. Mrs. Kitile indicates that she was like a "new baby" because she and her family depended on her sister and her family for everything they needed, including how to walk. For example, she recalls that her brother-in-law told her husband that he needed to walk fast and get around quickly as time is very important in the U.S. Mrs. Kitile states that her husband had hoped that he would be given a front seat in his brother-in-law's car, which did not happen. Additionally, Mrs. Kitile says, her husband had not expected he would be asked to take a trash out of the home, which he experienced as a form of disrespect: he had never done anything like that before. Furthermore, Mrs. Kitile reports that her husband barely took a role in cooking and washing dishes after eating, which he had to do in his wife's sister's new home. Mrs. Kitile indicates that adding the unfamiliar choruses to unmet expectations is like adding an insult to a wound for her husband.

Regarding work, Mrs. Kitile says, her brother-in-law and some friends advised her husband to forget his teaching degree, and to pick up any work he could find just like many immigrants do. She especially remembers one friend's advice about her husband's foreign credentials as follows: "Who cares about your teaching degree from Ethiopia.

They don't count here. Maybe they consider it as a diploma". A diploma in the Ethiopian education system is equivalent to an associate degree in the U.S. education system. Mrs. Kitile states that "It matters who you seek for advice as a new comer as people have the power to break or lift you up with their words, especially when you are a vulnerable newcomer immigrant." Mrs. Kitile reveals that all the failed expectations and occasional family squabbles over conflicts among children in her sister's home provoked friction and conflict in the families.

When Mrs. Kitile talks about her and her husband's confusion and regret of their coming to the U.S. because of their uncertainties about life and work situations, she illustrates the point in Oromo proverb as "*Muka jigetti, qottootu baay'ata*", which is translated as, "There are many axes on a fallen tree". She levels the fallen tree with her failed high expectations she had had prior to emigrating to the U.S. and during a few weeks after arrival. Mrs. Kitile reveals that she as well as her husband had not had adequate information about life condition in the U.S., and that they had never travelled elsewhere out of their native country. She states that all she imagined of the U.S. was a luxurious life awaiting her and her family. Additionally, Mrs. Kitile says, "*Kanumaafn dhufe*?" which is, "Was it for this?" Mrs. Kitile alludes to the stress and difficult life situation of finding a job and a place to live as a new comer.

Mrs. Kitile says she and her family moved out of her sister's home after her husband earned two pay stubs working as a baggage handler at Denver International Airport (DIA). She reveals that the money was just good enough to buy some food, and to rent relatively a cheap and affordable one bedroom apartment. Mrs. Kitile summarizes the ups and downs in her transition to life and work in the U.S. as follows:

> My "American dream" began to fade as my high expectations began to fail and the reality began to unfold at my sister's home and later in my own apartment. My optimism started surrendering to pessimism about life and work in general. This was even so when the congregation prayed for my husband and me in a Sunday church sermon so that we would get a job. My husband and I were like our three year old son and we had to begin a new life in our new land.

Mrs. Kitile highlighted the hard life she faced when she came to the U.S. She reveals that she had had great expectations of life and work in the U.S. prior to coming to the U.S., but it was to her shock that the reality about life and work is harder than she had imagined. When she alludes to her marriage and husband as well as her work, she reveals the following:

> I got married to my husband when I was a grade nine student and he was a teacher at that time, a high school English teacher for that matter, a language he's learning himself now… LOL. He's a baggage handler in the U.S. He wants to study nursing, but I'm not sure about it as the entrance to the program is tight and also it is expensive. I work for a Bradley gas station where I get all the curses and blessings—I meet many different people some of whom are mean by their words and actions and some are good. I often get caught up with my child's school work and home chorus because my husband works part-time as a cleaner at DIA besides his other work.

Mr. Kitile highlights the extra effort she and her husband put in searching for a job and how difficult it is for new comer immigrants to find a job that matches with their knowledge and skills they bring from their country of origin, as it is the case for her husband. Additionally, she reveals the burden of disrespect she encounters working at a gas station. Furthermore, it is important to note that Mrs. Kitile ventures inside and outside home keeping busy with house chorus and Lucy's homework besides her a full time work, while her husband just ventures outside home and busy working two jobs.

Endurance, faith, and hope in the face of hard life. Mrs. Kitile states that she is of two worlds: one of Ethiopia and the other of the U.S. She states that navigating both worlds is not easy in terms of language, culture, and expectations, especially as

related to communication and relationship with teachers. Mrs. Kitile states her and her family's life situation and the future in the U.S. as follows:

> Where do we go from here? But you know…thanks to God and He will lead and help us. We uprooted our foundation and sold what we had in Ethiopia to cover our expensive visa processing fee and air plane ticket cost to America. We even borrowed a lot of money from my sister that we are working hard to pay back. Now we are here in the new land with new hopes and adventures. It is like holding on to a tiger's tail…you know…if you release it, the tiger will come around you and eat you up.

Mrs. Kitile has strong conviction in God for guidance and help. Flashing back on the moment when they entered the Ethiopian air plane at the Bole International Air Port, Mrs. Kitile was ironically laughing at her husband of his taking a deep sigh of relief saying that he was relieved the moment he got into the plane to leave for the U.S. The irony is that things were not as hoped and expected. She points out that life is so difficult especially for her husband, who is a head and the main bread winner for the family while in Ethiopia. However, she affirms that they stick together and face the life challenges in their efforts to establish a new life in their new land. Mrs. Kitile mentions that her husband and she speak Amharic and Oromo, and some English. She indicates that they both grapple with language barrier to effectively support their child's leaning, while also learning the etiquettes of the U.S. to successfully integrate in the society.

When asked if she would still come to the U.S. had she known the life challenges she has to face as an immigrant, Mrs. Kitile expressed that she is happy to be here in the U.S. She reveals three stages of life many Ethiopian immigrants come to go through in the U.S: (a) "*Bagan dhufe,*" which means "It's good that I came to the U.S." This is during the first two weeks of festival of arrival and welcoming; (b) "*Maalifan dhufe*?" which means "Why did I come to the U.S.?" She reveals that this is a muddle stage of regret and uncertainty, and the last stage is (c) "*Bagan dhufe*", which means "It's good

that I came" This stage marks independence from the sponsoring and host families as it is after starting a work, learning how to drive a car, and regaining some power to make decisions for their own family. It is the stage when they begin rooting as a family in their new land and in their own rented apartment. It is important for educators to understand these stages and what they entail because they indicate the lived contexts of immigrant families, which impacts their relationships with a teacher and a school.

Mrs. Kitile is enthusiastic about topics we discussed and willingly shared her and her husband's life experiences in Ethiopia and here in the U.S. She indicates that they, as a family, have a strong faith in God and they believe that God will not forsake them in their difficult life as immigrants. Mrs. Kitile states that both her husband and she work hard to ensure their child's education for his bright future. In the next section, Mrs. Kitile's perception of education and teacher was presented and described from her view point.

APPENDIX F

NARRATIVES OF MR. BEDILU - CASE TWO

Mr. Bedilu: From Surviving to Thriving

Mr. Bedilu, Teklu's father, comes from a refugee background and he has such a great story of thriving from surviving. Mr. Bedilu narrates his trajectories to the U.S., and especially his wanders in refugee resettlement camps, as follow,

> I staggered alone toward the Sahara Desert, the mountains of my native Ethiopia shrinking behind me with each stride to escape the 1991 ethnic conflict and turmoil in the transition government of Ethiopia. Actually the local cadres were tough on me and schemed to kill me. My journey began in Gondar, Ethiopia where I was born and bred and got buried my belly button, which is hard. I spent weeks in the wilderness, until goatherds found me and took me to the dry riverbed that marked the Sudan border near Kurmuk. I risked death as death seemed certain. I feared the torture more than the death. After spending life in the horrific Jamam refugee camp in Sudan for three years, I was transferred to Kakuma refugee camp in 1994, where I stayed for seven years. I found little peace but faced horrific life of starvation, illness, and mostly dark side of life in general.

Mr. Bedilu's account of refugee journey and struggle to survive is incredible. He ran away from his native land to protect his life from the local cadres who plotted to kill him for his different political outlook. He wandered in the dry land and jungles, and suffered difficulties in refugee camps. He states that the relocation process is bureaucratic and time-consuming. Additionally, the case workers demand bribes from refugees to expedite the relocation process, otherwise they intimidate refugees by telling them that they can send them back to their countries of origin at any time. He specifically recollects about his case workers as follows:

> My case worker in Kenya, ARG…, I feel like I'm still in her control. She's cruel and always wanted to send me back to Ethiopia. Luckily, I got a chance to go to Egypt in 2001 where I lived for two years and then went to Europe, Malta Island, in 2003 where I lived and enjoyed life for three years. Life is better there and I got a chance to travel in Europe. I love over there …you know…Ireland's like heaven for me. It's peaceful and life is not hard. But I really wanted to come to the U.S. and I arrived in the U.S. in 2006.

Mr. Bedilu's refugee journey to the U.S. spans four countries and 15 years. He fled Ethiopia during the country's transitional government that defeated the military junta in 1991 of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), and local cadres of the new government marked him for death. After spending life in the horrific Jamam refugee camp in South Sudan's Upper Nile state for three years, Mr. Bedilu states that he was transferred to Kakuma refugee camp in the northwestern region of Kenya, where he stayed for seven years to be relocated to Egypt, where he lived for two years. From Egypt, he changed his name to go to Europe, where he happily lived for three years. Finally, he arrived in the U.S. in 2006. Charged with emotions, Mr. Bedilu alludes to his refugee experience in general, especially regarding his case worker in the refugee camp in Kenya. He reveals that the traumatic experience of life in the refugee camp, the bureaucracy and bribe to expedite the process accompanied by the fear and frustration of long and doubtful feelings of whether getting kicked back to Ethiopia or getting away to the U.S. is apparent from his tone of voice and facial expression.

Life in the Eyes of Mr. Bedilu

When Mr. Bedilu reflects life and work in general in the U.S., he is thankful to God and says that he is blessed with a wife and two children, which he states as follows:

> I started connecting with my fiancée while in Europe. She is from my hometown, Gondar, and you know somehow I got to know her. She sponsored me so that I could come to the U.S. We got married a year later after my arrival in the U.S. My middle life is stuffed with agony, but the beginning and end is good.

Mr. Bedilu says that he loves his country of origin, Ethiopia, while also he likes to be in the U.S. He states that life is full of struggle everywhere, but in a different ways. Mrs. Bedilu describes life as follows:

> Life is always like seeking a refuge…you know…but once a refugee, you're always a refugee. I'm Christian and I had to change my name to Muslim name to

> mingle in Egypt so that life would be easy for me there. The change of name also facilitated my transition to Europe. I went by the name "Ali" until I got to Europe and then to the U.S., which I changed back to my real name. I live for my kids now. I don't care much about myself; I care more about my family.

With respect to work in the U.S., Mrs. Bedilu indicates that hard work and dedication to family makes one a man. He knows that there is no easy money and easy life, but one has to earn the good life he/she wants to live. Regarding this, he states that:

> If you work hard, you can be a man in the U.S. You can also be an insane person if you don't make good choices. I try to do the best for my children and that's why my wife and I work until we get exhausted with two jobs. I'm a baggage handler at DIA and also I drive taxi part-time. My wife cleans hotel rooms and also she works at Bradley gas station part-time. It's tough but now we're used to it.

Mr. Bedilu believes and stresses that hard work and devotion to family is way to be successful in life. He warns that if people do not make good choices in terms of work and life in general, they may end up in disaster, especially in the U.S. where there are so many choices.

Arrival. Mr. Bedilu arrived in Denver, Colorado in the winter of 2006 after a painful long journey and a difficult life as a refugee. On arrival, Mr. Bedilu was warmly welcomed by his fiancée and her mother as well as the church group. He indicates that he also found some old friends in the Church groups, which helped him in navigating life and work in his new land. Mr. Bedilu reveals that they have families back home in Ethiopia, the families over there do not really know what America is. He points out that his mother-in-law was a great support with child care for them so that they could work more hours and support his own family here in the U.S. and the families in Ethiopia. He sadly expresses that his mother-in-law was a great support for his children, but she passed away when the children were only under two years old. Mr. Bedilu reveals that his own

families and the extended families in Ethiopia count on him, which he says it is hard to shoulder all these responsibilities. Another difficulty Mr. Bedilu mentions is assimilation with the U.S. culture. He states that besides language that poses a major difficulty, culture, value system, tradition, belief system, and personal and social rituals are all different and not easy to connect.

Mr. Bedilu has taken difficult life trajectories from Ethiopia to Europe, where he restored for a while until he reached his ultimate destination, the U.S. He says that he is used to a refugee life and he sees life from a refugee perspective. Mr. Bedilu's difficult life trajectory is still fresh in his mind as he narrates but he is grateful he is living in the U.S., where he states it is good for his children's learning and growth. He indicates the lack of time and expertise to fully function as partners with Mrs. Aisha and the IEP team. He states that he and his wife are not as outwardly perceived by others, and that they work hard to support their children by supplying their needs and by trying their best to work with the teacher as much as they can. He also mentioned that his wife came to the U.S. before him through a marriage to another person, and she divorced within a years due to some disagreements. He indicates that they both have been through rough times and now they both focus on their children.

Mr. Bedilu repeats his quote, "once a refugee, always a refugee" to make his point that he is used to difficult life and that he is not as worried as he used to be about life and work anymore. He recollects that he completed high school in Ethiopia in good times and no one asked him for advance education for his work in Ethiopia as a truck driver, which he indicates he also never bothered himself for further learning. However, looks back and regret that they did not have a chance to go to college because he is

struggling to support his children with their school work. Below is the interview data of Mr. Bedilu as pertinent to the education of Teklu and relationship with Mrs. Aisha, Teklu's 1st grade teacher.

APPENDIX G

NARRATIVES OF MRS. ALMAZ - CASE THREE

Mrs. Almaz: Winning a Lottery to the U.S.

Mrs. Almaz, with her husband and their eight years old daughter at the time of this research, immigrated to the United States in 2007 on winning a Diversity Visa (DV) lottery. The U.S. Department of State explains the program as:

> The congressionally mandated Diversity Immigrant Visa Program makes available 50,000 DV annually, drawn from random selection among all entries to persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. (U.S. Department of State, 1997).

Mrs. Almaz is a soft-spoken lady who often smiles and laughs as she talks. She narrates her life experience as follow:

> You know I was engaged with a man I don't even know as it's the case in our area, which is typical in my area of Bahir Dar, Gondar, Gojam, etc. I was in 9th grade and I don't even know anything about him and he is older than me…he's 45 and I'm only 32 now. Elders came to our home and asked for me to marry my husband now. At the time, he is a peddler with a tray strapped over his back and soon he owned his own store with his hard work and perseverance in Bahir Dar town. He has music store and sells religious song and other music CDs and cassettes. We soon had our first child, she is 13 years old now and learns at…Middle School. During the day I do house chores and during the evening I go to school…you know "night school?" Yes, that's how I finished high school, but my husband quitted school in 9th grade and started doing business. The saying "Our families who educated us without themselves have education" includes him…LOL…. As soon as I finished high school, I won DV Lottery and that's relief for both of us. Good thing my husband has some money and my cousin sister is here…you know she came with her family five years before me with DV Lottery…LOL…She also helped us with some money. We borrowed some from her to buy three tickets to the U.S. He sold his store to use for our itinerary. We're here now and life is…you know…struggle with work and everything.

Mrs. Almaz reveals that she got married to a merchant at early age when she was 14 and became a housewife while going to school in her local town of Bahir Dar working towards finishing high school in the evenings, through extended studies program. Bahir Dar is situated on the southern shore of Lake Tana, the source of the Blue Nile (or Abay), and it is the capital of the Amhara Region in Ethiopia. Mrs. Almaz says that she managed to graduate from high school with her dedication and with her husband's

support although it took her long. She indicates that it is not very common back then back there.

Arrival. Mrs. Almaz states that arrival and transitions was smooth as she has her sister here. Her sister with her husband welcomed them in their apartment. She recollects their initial life here in the U.S. as follows:

> The first two weeks were celebrations and all fun. I soon started realize life's difficult when I see my brother-in-law working to jobs and we barely see him. My sister works one job and we see her after 4pm. My husband also started getting board as he doesn't like to be idle. But we have to wait for our green card and social security number to search for job, which we got after one month. My sister comes home tired. House chores and taking care of my own and their three children became my major responsibility. You know…how I can just sit when they are busy. It's difficult when you ask them for everything and my husband and I are also like other children…LOL...But, luckily, Lucy went to Kindergarten, it's like a childcare for us, so that we're free to get around and do the transition things…you know what I'm talking about….

From the above excerpt, Mrs. Almaz indicates that arrival and the first couple of weeks are festivals of welcoming to the U.S., which soon begins to fade. She metaphorically likens it with having a birthday party and she reveals that families and friends say, "Count your age from now and here…forget your past life."

Expectations and reality. When she talks about her great expectations when she came to the U.S. and the reality she is facing, Mrs. Almaz begins with work situation. She states that being a jobless and dependent on her sister and her family is not easy feeling when she came. However, she feels that Lucy was in school in Kindergarten and that gave them some freedom to facilitate their transition to work and life here in the U.S. as they could get time to do different things during the school hours. Mrs. Almaz thinks I understand what she means as she talks, considering that I am also an immigrant who

came to the U.S. through DV Lottery. Before I ask her a question, Mrs. Almaz continues talking about work as follows,

> After we got our "green cards" and social security numbers…mine came first and my husband's delayed for about two weeks…I don't know what happened, but they mentioned something about wrong address, but that was to his distress as he wants to start work quickly. I was lucky enough to get a job in Wal-Mart as a stocker. It was night shift and my job is to fill-in shelves. There's this lady in our church and she found me the job. After he got his green card, my husband started working in airport…friends from church brought him application form and took him to the airport…he pushes cart and wheel chair. I think it is after two months…we rented our own apartment and started our own life…Huff…that's relief. Even though she's my sister, it's difficult…you know…especially it's tough for my husband as he wants to be independent. Their apartment is two bed-room…now they have house…and that's even difficult…imagine three of us and five of them…In Ethiopia, it doesn't matter, but here…you know…people are changed and it's good just at a distance.

Mrs. Almaz clearly narrates the details of their arrival and how life was in the beginning and later on. Mrs. Almaz mentions "green card", which is also known as "permanent resident card" that is lawfully granted to a person in authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis. In her account, she indicates that her husband wanted to start work and live independently of the sponsoring family, which she also wants. She says that they later managed to find jobs and moved out in two months. She mentions the support of some church friends in getting a job. Before they started working, Mrs. Almaz indicates that they realized the busy and difficult life of the host family. Mrs. Almaz indicates that they got relief that they found some jobs and rented their own apartment as she feels, unlike in Ethiopia, it is difficult for both families to live together here in the U.S. Regarding present status in terms of work and life, Mrs. Almaz reports that,

> You know, it's seven years now and I've changed a lot of jobs. What can you do if it's inconvenient with family and especially children and when husband is busy…LOL…I started out as a stocker in Wal-Mart, then I became a Bradley gas station attendant that I tried for a while. I started CNA (Certified Nurse Assistant)

> training and the State certification exam is difficult and I left it off there. I worked in a thrift store. Now I work as in-home care-giver. As assigned by an agency, I go around homes every day and do house chores and shopping for the old. I sometimes take them for walk…which's the fun part…LOL…However, I often get caught up with my child's school work for my children and my own house chores. Huff.…life is busy here, and we took a short vacation trip to Ethiopia this last summer, which we really enjoyed and we're now back to the business. My husband, you know, he has a business concept from the beginning and now he's a share-holder of a union taxi. He is a hardworking man he runs his own business here in the U.S. He drives union taxi and he makes good money, which is good for the family. But he suffered a lot to achieve this. He started out as a wheel chair attendant at DIA; he became RTD (Regional Transport District) bus driver; then he became a yellow taxi driver; and final a union taxi share-holder. You know, in the beginning about four years ago, you buy the share-holder just for $5000, but now guess what…it's about $30,000 to join the business as a share-holder. We're thankful to God and learned to trust Him for the future.

Mrs. Almaz is a self-starter and goes on with in the conversation and seems to be content and confident, especially in her husband's hard-working and success as a business-owner in the U.S. She reveals that both her husband and she have taken some rough cross roads in life, mainly during their transition time and down the road to their present status, which she indicates that God has helped them so far and they trust Him in their life. In spite of the fact that she is inapt to pass the State qualification certification exam to be a CNA, she seems to enjoy her current job as a home care-giver, which connects to be her initial passion to be a nurse in Ethiopia just in a different way of helping people who need support because they are old and weak and/or sick.

APPENDIX H

RESEARCHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY: AN INSIGHT FROM THE INSIDER

Background

I was born into proud parents of an educator father and a skilled housewife. My father, who used to be an elementary English teacher, is a district elementary supervisor (coordinator). Both of my parents are dedicated to raising five boys through exemplary hard work and a strong faith to God. I am the first born of five boys, and being the first born of a family entails inherent responsibilities. I have shouldered responsibilities of being a role model for my brothers. This includes being obedient to my parents, being polite and respectful, caring for others, helping my brothers and parents, and going to college and earning a higher degree among all others. Following my father's path, I earned an Associate and Bachelor of Arts degrees in English language teaching and a Master of Arts degree in education in Ethiopia. I am pursuing my Doctor of Education degree in the U.S. Following my example of hard work and motivation to learn, my brothers went to college and earned degrees in teaching, law, and medicine.

Growing up in the west Oromia region of Ethiopia, I did not experience diversity in terms of language and culture until I went to college and started work since it was just a homogenous society. However, the living standard was diverse depending on the income, which depends on the level of education and the status education level entails. As there are few options available in life, as a means of survival and upward mobility, education is a major way to a better life. Education brings good life and a better opportunity that the general illiterate society lucks. This was a driving force for me to complete high school and earn college degree. As a high school English teacher, I also got a chance to work for the Swedish Philadelphia Church Mission in Ethiopia. This gave me an opportunity to attain a better life and status, and I was even able to support

my brothers with some basic needs. I have been happily married for eleven years to my high school sweetheart. My wife and I graduated from the same high school, went to the same college, earned the same degrees mentioned above, and taught English in the same high school.

DV Lottery

My wife and I with our three year old daughter won a Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery to come to the U.S. in the year 2007. Prior to that, my wife and I did not have experience of traveling and living in another country. However, we had some experiences with missionaries from Europe and the U.S. in Ethiopia. For example, my high school English teacher was a European-American from the U.S. I happily accepted the DV Lottery and planned to come to the U.S. hoping for better opportunities with respect to life and education. But I did not have information about life situation in the U.S. prior to my immigration. Although we were sponsored by an Ethiopian church pastor whom I have known from Ethiopia, all the visa processing fees and air plane tickets as well as all the itinerary expenses were all my responsibility. On arrival, I was stunned by the beauty of the U.S. in terms of its airport, landscape, highways, homes, and buildings, and the people are great. In the airport, it was much to my surprise to see a group of ladies smoking, which is uncommon in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia while generally men smoke and it is normal, women rarely smoke and few women who smoke are regarded as out of the norm.

Transition: Language, Culture, Work and Life

Transition to the U.S. way of life and work was just difficult and stressful mainly because of my limited oral English language proficiency. There was no need and

motivation to use English outside of school in Ethiopia, and thus oral communication is relatively difficult. Although I was a proud and respected English teacher in Ethiopia, I struggled with the American accent, which made communication with people and job interviews challenging and traumatic. Once a white collar, always a white collar in Ethiopia, and thus it was hard for me to accept an entry level job that did not match my university degree. Finding a job and a place to live was a nightmare.

However, as a matter of survival, I had to seek and accept any jobs until I became a school district cultural liaison in the Denver metro area. I earnestly wanted to work in an education setting so that I could advance in my education. Work as well as life in the U.S. is generally tough as I am more visible in terms of English language proficiency and race among all others. The education and work ground is not a leveled field for me as an immigrant and I have to overwork to level it. For example, besides the academic course work, I have to learn the language and the academic and social etiquette of the U.S. to connect to my cohort and professors. The hurdles and barriers I face are just because I was not born and raised in the U.S., and thus I do not have the foundation in the U.S. society and culture, which makes life difficult.

School System

The education system in Ethiopia is rooted in the traditional church orthodoxy, which regards teachers as "sage on the stage" and students as obedient leaners who are not expected to advance their thinking and challenge teachers. Parents may support school through labor and/or money for building, but there are no parent-teacher partnerships for a child's education. The development of modern education in Ethiopia is at an early stage, and the building is traditional rooms in a row with their own doors.

Teachers use chalkboard and there are no enough seats and books for students. The class size is large—classes of up to 80 students are common. The school structure of 1st through 12th grades has four cycles: First cycle primary schools, grades 1-4; second cycle primary schools, grades 5-8; junior secondary schools, grades 9-10; and senior secondary schools, grades 11-12. The academic year runs from September to July, and education is free at the primary and secondary level. English is a medium of instruction at secondary level and higher education.

At the end of the second cycle of primary education all students in all regions are required to take the 8th grade national examination in order to ensure the quality of primary education and coverage of the curriculum (standard). At the end of 10th grade education, students take The Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE), based on which determine which students are streamlined into academic (college preparation) and vocational and technical schools based on their results. Those going into academic fields are expected to sit for college entrance examination of the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE) at the end of 12th grade after two years of preparation and the others will either join the labor market or be self-employed. The first Ethiopian institution of higher education, the Addis Ababa University College, was established in 1950, and public and private universities and colleges have been expanding since then, especially during the years of 1990's and 2000's.

As a student and teacher in Ethiopian education system, I come from the abovementioned background, and it was not easy for me to go to my child's school to confer with a teacher about my child's learning and academic growth. After living for

three years in the U.S., my initial walk to my child's elementary school in 2010 was intimidating as it was full of anxiety thinking about what and how to initiate and engage in the conversation with my child's Kindergarten teacher. The school building layout as well as the office managers, classrooms full of teaching materials and resources is different from what I know in Ethiopia. Besides, as a student, I did not have my parents come to school and discuss with my teachers about my education except that my father informally discusses with teachers about my school progress when he meets and mingles with teachers out of school. Likewise, as a teacher, I did not meet with parents of my students to discuss students' academic progress and/or I did not have any form of partnership with parents about their children's education. Therefore, my initial parent-teacher conference in the U.S. was a new experience for me even though I had been a teacher myself.

The Researcher's Educational Philosophy

Each individual child or adult is a unique individual, and I believe in a teaching philosophy that facilitates discovery of each student potential through support, honor, and a positive learning atmosphere. Young children are vulnerable and need a unique attention from adults with respect to nurturing them academically, socially, and emotionally. All children deserve an excellent education and to learn how to think for themselves, and how to speak and write clearly and effectively.

Adult learners tend to be autonomous, independent, and self-reliant, and they need a structure and instruction that help them to become more self-directed learners towards their specific goals. Additionally, adult learners have historically, personally, socially

and culturally acquired and developed wealth of knowledge and skills that needs to be recognized, valued and utilized as a pedagogical asset.

As an educator, I strive to create a learning environment that is safe and conducive, and I understand and respect the racial, ethnic, cultural, language, and socio-economic diversity of all my students.

Final Thoughts

My final analysis of the research data and my own autobiographical reflection, I have learned that immigrants have common and unique paths to the U.S. Immigrants' main motivation for coming to the U.S. is mainly to gain better economic and educational opportunities while there are also refugees who seek safety for their lives besides the same opportunities many immigrants chase. Because every person has a unique story to tell, immigrants' courses to the U.S., assets they bring with them, how their transitions affect their lives, in general, and their children's learning at school and home, and strategies for success should be analyzed on a case by case basis even though they are from the same tribe. I am an immigrant from Ethiopia, and I do not have necessarily the same story with another immigrant from the same country just like all North Americans do not have the same stories, which indicates that generalizations and dichotomies may be difficult and unrealistic.